



## Public submission made to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

Submitter: Kids Giving Back  
Submitting as a: Parent or community organisation  
State: NSW

### Summary

Kids Giving Back is a not-for-profit charity with a mission to provide hands on, age appropriate, meaningful service learning and volunteering opportunities for kids 6-18. You can learn more about our work and its student impact from this short video: <http://tinyurl.com/VideoKidsGivingBack>. We are committed to creating the next generation of generosity through offering diverse service learning and volunteering opportunities to students. Our work validates our position and recommendation that Service Learning is not an adjunct to “real” education but indeed is a component of what education today must be.

The recommendations and research outlined above demonstrate the links between service learning and wellbeing to positive educational outcomes for kids. We recognise the challenges of schools and governments in this area and we welcome the opportunity to meet and response to ensure Service Learning is offered equitably to all Australian schools.

Kids Giving Back advocates for increased access for all students to participate in Service Learning opportunities. We are well positioned to expand and deliver more programs to a wider area of schools where there is government commitment to recognize service learning and funding provided to schools to dedicate time in the curriculum. Our approach is collaborative. Government and schools need us and we need them to expand our successful and impactful programs to reach more kids.

### Main submission

Kids Giving Back welcomes the opportunity to comment and put forth ideas on the quality reforms that are needed to drive improved student outcomes.

Kids Giving Back ([www.kidsgivingback.org](http://www.kidsgivingback.org)) is a not-for-profit charity operating since 2012. Our mission is to provide hands on, age appropriate, meaningful service learning and volunteering opportunities for kids 6-18. Our programs provide opportunities for kids to give back, positively engage in the wider community, learn

new skills and connect with diverse communities. We seek to promote social inclusion, enhance future employability, instil lifelong social conscience and in turn develop the next generation of leaders who value and exhibit generosity and civic responsibility.

Social isolation, impact of technology, mental health challenges and breakdown of the communal village mean kids make connections through technology, not real-life experiences. We believe that the mire of challenges kids face can be mitigated through diverse and rich service learning and volunteering experiences aimed at reconnecting kids with community, developing their resilience, problem solving and encouraging service as a part of life.

The following is our recommendations to improve outcomes and educational performance for all students through service learning:

Developing capabilities, skills and knowledge through Service Learning

Educational success for students includes more than a solid foundation in maths, science, technology and engineering; and more than sports participation. It should include the development of empathy, resilience, confidence, generosity, civic responsibility and community awareness and engagement. Young people in our contemporary society need hard and soft skills. Soft skills like resilience. Resilient people are adept at seeing things from another person's point of view. When we empathize with others, we feel less alone and less entrenched in pain. Being of service to others is a powerful way of stoking resilience. In studies, researchers find serotonin, the neurotransmitter associated with feelings of happiness and wellbeing, is more efficient in people engaged in acts of kindness. Our programs are formal organised acts of kindness that contribute to the wellbeing of youth. Research suggests that young people who are provided with opportunities to volunteer, experience better mental health, increased skills for future employability, contribute to building better communities and have increased confidence and social relationships (Source Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY 2015).

The Wellbeing Framework for Schools and School Excellence Framework requires schools to incorporate strategies for improving student engagement and wellbeing into school planning. Schools should provide opportunities for all students to actively contribute to their community through mentoring, student service learning and volunteering. Kids Giving Back has a three-pronged approach that comprises 1) Education 2) Action and 3) Reflection. This means that kids learn about the people and communities they help, they participate actively in hands-on volunteering and they reflect on how this has impacted them. We have demonstrated experience in developing tailor made service learning programs for schools, enabling students to

engage with a range of communities including the aged, asylum seekers, homeless, disabilities and more.

Our programs enhance future employability. All of our service learning and volunteer programs require students to show up and be accountable, take task direction, work in teams, problem solve, learn about a social topic and how best to engage and make a difference. Skills learned by volunteering are transferable to paid work and are enhanced by the confidence that students gain in helping others. Further, Kids Giving Back has proprietary programs targeted to youth-at-risk to expose them to careers and develop skills necessary for in the workplace. Hands on learning outside the classroom are an effective way to increase the success of students.

Supporting Research:

- Service learning in the USA and the UK Government's 'Step up to Serve' program shows that service learning yields significant positive impacts on students' academic engagement, civic engagement and social-emotional development, and is strongly linked to academic engagement and school attendance.
- Germany and other EU countries have replaced compulsory military service with voluntary community action.
- Scotland and Canada 'social action' is established in school curriculums to support high levels of student engagement with volunteering

We believe that Service Learning is not an adjunct to "real" education but indeed is a component of what education today must be.

Government and school funding for Service Learning in school curriculums to significantly impact on learning outcomes for all students including disadvantaged and vulnerable students

Our business is young people and we feel strongly about their education, their schools and the society in which they learn and grow. We believe that government and schools should fund service learning programs to boost student performance and student outcomes. The majority of schools do not have the funding or allocate time in the curriculum to take on excursion programs. We advocate that this should not be the case and that service learning be integrated into the curriculum and supported within the school timetable.

The Committee on Children and Young People Report 4/55 – November 2014, volunteering and unpaid work placements among children and young people in NSW, note the barriers to volunteering can be particularly acute for disadvantaged and at-risk young people, young people from culturally diverse backgrounds, and young people living in regional and remote areas. Young people from low

socioeconomic circumstances have been found to be more motivated to volunteer in order to gain work experience than their peers. The government, as part of excellence in education, should reduce the barriers for young people Australia wide to have access to service learning programs.

There are insufficient resources for public schools, rural schools and schools in disadvantaged areas to implement Service Learning programs. Kids Giving Back receives requests to bring our programs to regional areas and other states. We have recently been awarded the NSW Premiers grant for social cohesion to expand our programs into Western Sydney.

We offer opportunities for young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds to access hands on, meaningful volunteering experiences leading to increased sense of community belonging. Our work enables youth to connect with diverse communities and to develop the core qualities of empathy, resilience, and tolerance.

With more funding support, we can expand further to reduce the barriers for disadvantaged and vulnerable young people from volunteering.

Supporting research:

- [Service-Learning: Implications for Empathy and Community Engagement in Elementary School Children](#) – showed service-learning analyses revealed an overall change in empathy and community engagement for all grades
- According to developmental psychologist [Marilyn Price Mitchell](#), children who perform acts of kindness experience increased wellbeing, popularity and acceptance among peers. This, in turn, leads to better classroom behaviour and higher academic achievement.
- A recent UK Study, [Growing Up Giving: Insights Into How Young People Feel About Charity](#), found that young people are interested in and positive about charities and have “great charitable expectations”. The report also finds that schools “lie at the heart of the bond between young people and charities” and is the primary means by which charitable giving is encouraged.
- [Youth volunteering in Australia: An evidence review](#) - found that among other things, benefits of volunteering for young people are both personal and social, and include strengthening social relationships, developing skills, enhancing career prospects.

Recognition for service learning as an enabler

Systems of recognition for volunteering encourage participation. Kids Giving Back has a practice of acknowledging all students who participate in our volunteering programs. We have seen first-hand how recognising a young person’s volunteering efforts can have a lasting effect on them individually as well as their school

community. Schools and other educational organisations can play a key role in facilitating young people's positive experience of volunteering especially where the promotion of the importance of social participation is emphasised.

Supporting research:

- NSW Parliament Committee on Children and Young People: State-level recognition of volunteering activities was found to be a key driver in encouraging young people to volunteer
- ARACY (2015) – recommends acknowledging and publicly recognising young people's volunteering has been found to encourage participation (Gage & Thapa, 2012). Governments have the capacity, together with community consultation, of developing and recognising best practice.

Multi-stakeholder engagement in providing volunteering opportunities – Government, schools, companies and not-for-profits

While there are many philanthropic organisations in Australia, and over 60,000 charities, Kids Giving Back is the only provider that offers a breadth of service learning and volunteering experiences to schools, corporates and community groups. Since inception, fifty-five charity partners engaged, twenty-seven schools participated (85% repeat registration rate) and an average of four new school reached each year. Participation rates have increased annually and over 12,000 people have participated in Kids Giving Back programs. Our model provides impact and is needed more broadly in all schools. The government's responsibility is to educate and develop the whole student and enable them to be empowered to succeed in life. This responsibility can, if needed, be efficiently outsourced to organisations like Kids Giving Back for all schools.

We effectively collaborate to pool resources to achieve greater societal impact. Our unique service effectively engages kids and schools to volunteer. We recognise to deliver real results and long term social impact it is essential to have a sector wide approach bringing together government, schools, companies and not-for-profits in which we seek to foster.

We also acknowledge the importance of matching kids with volunteering opportunities that suit their motivations, skills and interests in order to ensure an on-going commitment to volunteering through our Kid Giving Back online hub.

Reducing Barriers to Service Learning in Schools

Government's role is very important in supporting students' success through access to opportunities that enhance their connectedness, wellbeing and skills development. Government can and should reduce the barriers to all students in public and private schools. The key barriers to overcome include:

- Tight school budgets, staffing changes, crowded curricula and restraints in school capacity present challenges to offering our programs in schools
- Lack of government policy and funding

Supporting research:

- ARACY (2015) recommends that government should establish and 'authorising environment' in schools to enable school to develop and embed greater opportunities for young people to experience Service Learning through the school