

Recipient Details

Name of organisation or individual: [O] Tomorrow Today Foundation

Reference Type: Philanthropy

State or territory: Vic

Serial Identification Number: 477926

Responses

Curriculum and assessment

The Australian Curriculum is not meeting the learning needs and interests of rural students because it is delivered via only one learning environment - schools. Children learn in three environments - the family, the community and schools - and the gap between learning outcomes of RRR students and other communities will continue to widen whilst the family and community continue to be dismissed as "social factors" influencing school outcomes.

Schools have a crucial role in teaching and developing children, as well as in identifying children at risk, identifying learning difficulties, and intervening intensively to address individual learning needs. However schools are just one learning environment. Tomorrow Today Foundation recognises that children's education occurs in the family and in the community as well as in school. Benalla's whole-of-community approach to improving student outcomes works across the three learning environments. In contrast to the educational research sector, child development research has demonstrated for a number of years that learning happens in the family and the community as well as in school. The recent major project on Australian Child Wellbeing (Redmond, Skattheybol et al 2016) draws the link between child wellbeing and lifelong learning and opportunity. At Tomorrow Today we believe that by working across all three learning environments Benalla will see, over time, a change in measures of student performance that sit outside the experience of other rural communities. The gap in educational outcomes between Benalla's children and children from more advantaged communities will narrow and eventually close. By 2030 Tomorrow Today will see its Education Benalla Program's desired outcome achieved - that education and training completion rates of Benalla's 17 - 24 year olds will equal or exceed the state average.

Families and communities are excellent learning environments for the seven general capabilities outlined in the Australian Curriculum. A great deal can be done to refine how RRR community strengths can be nurtured to improve student outcomes in each of these areas. Tomorrow Today would be very pleased to work with the Commonwealth to help translate the general capabilities into the two learning environments that sit outside of school.

Rating: 6

Teachers and teaching

Rating: 0

Leaders and leadership

Rating: 0

School and Community

The parent/carer is a child's first and most important educator. Children learn in three environments - the family, the school and the community. Therefore what happens to children in their home and community environments must not be sidelined in any discussion about education. Families teach children to be literate and numerate as do schools; communities teach children to relate and aspire as do teachers.

Tomorrow Today Foundation - Benalla's community foundation - works with 140 community groups, government agencies, businesses and all Benalla schools to improve student outcomes across the whole child population (0 - 24 years). The program works across the three learning environments of family, community and school to achieve four aims -

1. All Benalla Children Start School Ready to Learn
2. Literacy and Numeracy improves
3. Student assessed levels of wellbeing improve
4. Family and community expectations of education are raised

It is a long term program that commenced in 2010. Already Australian Early Development Census data is showing improvement with significantly more children considered 'on track' and significantly less children considered "at risk". The Program, funded to date substantially by philanthropy, has been assessed as on track to achieve its aims. The desired outcome is that by 2030 the education and training completion rates of Benalla's children will equal or exceed the state average - an outcome of international significance, should it be achieved; as Benalla is a highly disadvantaged community. (Benalla is in the most disadvantaged "top 40" of Victoria's 726 postcodes).

Commonwealth and State Governments should buy-in to a partnership with philanthropy in Benalla to demonstrate long term, sustained positive change in educational outcomes in this rural community. It should invest in a partnership to achieve this demonstration that identifies the need to work across children's three learning environments - the family, community and school - to improve student outcomes in rural and disadvantaged communities.

Rating: 7

Information and Communication Technology

Rating: 0

Entrepreneurship and schools

Rural communities like Benalla have a natural and needs-based inclination for entrepreneurship. Often a farm family will have a number of enterprises at any one time that ebb and flow with market and other opportunities. Likewise the commercial, health and community and industry sectors are driven to find opportunities for growth — all look outwards for opportunities. So rural communities have a deep strength in helping schools improve their level of entrepreneurship. Unfortunately schools are often not attuned to this, although there are notable exceptions. For example Edspace in Benalla has established enterprises that ensure students learn for success in the world.

Tomorrow Today Foundation, Benalla's community foundation, is able to highlight community strengths and promote cross-sector collaboration. Tomorrow Today funds the tradie/artisan essential to the "Hands on Learning" program at Benalla P-12 College and FCJ College. This program keeps students connected to school and helps them realise their potential by valuing capabilities

such as fixing and making things. It finds a different way to teach literacy and numeracy which is reinforced in the classroom.

It is apparent that sometimes, schools are so inwardly focussed that they do not see opportunities knocking. Rather than recognise an opportunity and adapt a timetable or structure to take advantage of it, the school is more likely to bypass the opportunity and make their attempts to reach out at times and with restrictions that reduce the likelihood of success. Attitudes to partnerships matter — some professional development about the nature of “equal but different” partnerships would be helpful. Tomorrow Today works with all Benalla’s schools to introduce and coordinate community partnerships that build on Benalla’s natural entrepreneurial strengths. The partnerships can be between a trained community mentor and a student, helping the student to build their capacities and aspiration; or the partnership can be brokered between the school and a business, club or organisation to benefit the wider student community.

Rating: 6

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding

Rating for enrolments: 0

Rating for clusters: 0

Rating for distance education: 0

Rating for boarding: 0

Diversity

The impact of poverty is substantial on Benalla children’s learning outcomes and level of school attainment. Tomorrow Today Foundation partners with Benalla’s school to help mediate the effects of poverty on a child’s opportunities. It requires multiple approaches that can include material aid, matched mentoring, and liaison between and across families and schools to reduce the likelihood of missed opportunities. Regular professional development for teachers and school leaders is suggested. Suitable training would help teachers understand the pervasive effects of poverty on children. The right training would also bear out the strengths that communities provide, and how families, communities and teachers can be part of the solution.

Rating: 6

Transitioning beyond school

In Benalla, we believe that transitioning beyond Year 12 and completing an apprenticeship, diploma or degree is to the establishment of life long learning.

The Education Benalla Program run by Tomorrow Today Foundation partners with over 140 local organisations, government agencies and schools to work across the three learning environments of family, school and community.

We value our relationship with Goulburn Ovens TAFE and note that campuses in smaller towns provide opportunities for many young people. In this way, TAFEs provide non market-based services that other Registered Training Organisations would not.

Part of our overall program approach is to raise aspirations and strengthen relationships, and we do this very well via community-wide and family-focused activities. We also work directly in and with schools. For example, we fund bus trips to Melbourne based universities during university semesters so Benalla students can see universities on a typical day. We involve ex-Benalla students

to talk about their city-based lives. We also fund parental engagement in information sessions such as “Can My Wallet Afford It?” to help raise community awareness, discussion and aspiration. Through local donations, we also fund scholarships to help students with a plan and a need transition to tertiary education as there is no doubt that current government support is insufficient for many Benalla students.

The Education Benalla Program run by Tomorrow Today has four aims that are on track to be achieved over the next 5 - 10 years:

1. All Benalla Children Start School Ready to Learn
2. Literacy and Numeracy improves
3. Student assessed levels of wellbeing improve
4. Family and community expectations of education are raised

Whilst individual children can certainly be assisted to successfully transition to further education, to achieve a whole generational change requires a long term approach that we are taking in Benalla through the Education Benalla Program. More children need to stay and complete Year 12 - a substantial difficulty in RRR communities. To realise that, the four aims outlined above need to be achieved in a significant, measured manner - and Benalla is on track.

Rating: 6

Additional Comments

Education in the home and neighbourhood environments happens. Improving literacy and numeracy, community aspiration and retention through Year 12 requires that families and communities be recognised and validated as educational environments as important as - but different to - schools. Recognising families and communities as educational environments makes them part of the solution.

All families and communities have strengths and weaknesses. For instance, in Benalla’s case, it is possible to use cross-sector collaboration across the service system and strong social capital to mitigate at least some of the effects of disadvantage that impact on a child’s educational trajectory.

Whilst “social factors” are often blamed for lower educational performance in RRR communities, the discussion about solutions tends to be confined to schools. It seems evidence-based that more public policy attention be given to the family and community learning environments.

Tomorrow Today - Benalla’s community foundation - runs the Education Benalla Program. It is a whole-of-community, child-by-child intervention that has the active support and engagement of over 140 community, public and private organisations that operate in Benalla including all schools. It is on track to realise its desired outcome - that by 2030 the education completion rates of Benalla’s children aged 17 - 24 years will equal or exceed the state average. We would welcome an opportunity to demonstrate and discuss this successful place-based approach to improving educational outcomes in a rural community.