



Isolated Children's Parents Association Qld Inc.

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www.icpa.com.au

“Advocating for equitable education opportunities and support for rural and remote students.”

SUBMISSION

Putting Queensland Kids First

1. What are the core principles you think should inform our early intervention and prevention approach to support children, young people, and families?

Listening - potential solutions should be driven from the ground up, especially in rural and remote areas. Listen to people in these remote communities, inclusive of small and regional townships and their outlying areas. What will work for them and their specific needs and issues, pertaining to their demographic as a whole? Programs that work in larger centres may not be the solution for smaller communities. For example, the Connecting2u program, which is a free text messaging service to improve parental health literacy would not be a solution in a rural area as most of the parents do not live within mobile range and have unreliable connectivity. Initiate programs that are fit for people, purpose, and place. These programs are the ones that will have success, support, and relevance.

2. What are the key protective factors in keeping children and young people on positive trajectories, and can we further boost these?

Children from rural and remote locations, regardless of cultural or socioeconomic background, are inherently “at risk” of not reaching their full potential due to the inequitable access to education services in these areas. Often these families cannot afford the costs of completing compulsory education, apprenticeships, or post compulsory education. Children in these areas require services to support them to complete their education such as pastoral support, learning spaces with access to appropriate technology and equipment. If these services are not readily available it may require families to leave their community, away from familial and communal support. Expansion of onsite accommodation at strategic TAFE campuses, similar to Pimlico in Townsville, are an example of an approach that could assist with engagement, retention, and completion of post compulsory schooling/training by students outside urban centres. Country University Centres, which are emerging in rural and remote areas, are external training campuses that offer fast, reliable, internet solutions along with dedicated learning spaces that need to be supported by government.

Students who are undertaking a VET or SAT pathway are often those who struggle with the rigor of academics during their schooling. These students want to remain and train in their local regions with statistics for 2021/2022 demonstrating that 51% of government funded VET students were Rural and Remote. Programs already in place like Transition 2 Success and Project Booyah offer all round holistic support for participants. ICPA Qld believes that

Registered Training Organisations should offer similar support to all apprentices and trainees to help improve completion rates, which are currently very low.

Expanding the model used at some universities and TAFEs, for First Nation's post compulsory students to enable them to complete teaching/early childhood to all students from a designated remote area would be beneficial. Students would complete these courses and remain in rural and remote areas during/upon completion of the course. Learning in the student's place of residence increases the likelihood of success and then delivers much-needed skills into areas where traditionally attraction and retention is problematic. This will also provide positive role modelling within the community which, in turn, could increase the likelihood of other students engaging in similar activities.

The current Student Wellbeing Package must remain in place to ensure that rural and remote students have opportunities to engage with health care providers. This essential service will ensure students are moving on an upward trajectory especially given the increased challenges involved in accessing regular health providers.

To maximise successful educational outcomes for all students there needs to be a collaborative and cooperative trans departmental approach to sharing of information amongst allied health support services to diagnose any learning issues. Current policies or procedures that cause impediments should be thoroughly and systematically removed. The current siloed approach is allowing rural, remote, and geographically isolated regions to slip through the cracks and not necessarily access the support they need nor the modifications to their learning programs to maximise educational success for students in need.

Early intervention programs are vital but cannot burden the Education system which is already under immense pressure to fulfill societal deficits. The requirement for appropriate allied health services and external agencies is to provide independent support not added workload to small rural and remote teaching professionals. Burnout in rural and remote areas is common in this demographic.

3. Are there any other priorities you think that Putting Queensland Kids First should consider?

Investing in quality education from early years through to Secondary is vital to attract and retain quality teachers in rural and remote areas. Increasing pay rates of early child teachers and educators so positions in rural centres can be filled and early childhood centres remain open is essential. These services play an integral role in the growth of children in younger years. Upskilling parents/caregivers to enable them to support the learning and development of their children is an essential service needed in all rural and remote areas. Training should be readily available to upskill young people in rural and remote areas to enable them to deliver early education programs.

The Equity and Excellence Education Strategy outlines great initiatives but if small communities cannot attract teachers to deliver to families and the youth of these communities this program will not deliver the full range of benefits. In small towns the school is often the community hub and if the education system is strong, the community is vibrant, creating an eco-system that supports children and young people's health and well-being.

4. How can we best support connection to culture and community for children, young people, and families?

Connection to culture and community is not exclusive to first nations people. Currently a lot of support around connection to culture and community is focused on indigenous Australians. Whilst ICPA Qld understands the need for this support, all rural and remote children regardless of cultural heritage have a connection and affinity with their communities. Connection to culture and community needs to be celebrated and nurtured for those children as well. Whatever programs are put in place they need to be inclusive of all Queensland children.

By supporting and strengthening connection to community in young people and children in combination with ensuring they can fulfill their educational potential, it will encourage the return and retention of young people bringing skills, knowledge and a diversity of opportunities that will in turn strengthen and sustain regional communities. This strengthening of connection will be made possible through responsive and responsible provision of health, education and police services, infrastructure, and facilities. By taking these actions it will also attract and retain essential service providers to communities.

Rural women, who bear much of the responsibility of raising and educating children, need connection and support. This is often not possible in many isolated rural communities and seeking help is often difficult. Family networks can be the most powerful and effective support platform which then flows onto the support for the young person as they learn and immerse themselves into the society.

5. What would it look like for us to work together as partners, all committed to improving outcomes for children and young people?

Recognising organisations that have connections and programs already in place that are working successfully and supporting those and making sure that all areas including non-indigenous rural and remote communities are listened to and valued. Policies made with a 'city' centric approach do not fit and deliver the best outcomes for children and young people in rural, remote, and geographically isolated areas. Throughout the state, listening, partnering, and working with groups, organisations and agencies based in those areas will be more aligned with needs and deliver outcomes appropriate for all areas.