

About Us

Thrive Group Tasmania [Thrive] is a Not for Profit provider of Education and Care in Tasmania. We are governed by a board of Volunteers with a wide range of professional skills and backgrounds. Thrive currently operates eight Early Learning Centres (birth to school-aged), with six of these services* also providing outside school hours care [OSHC] to Primary School Children (Beaconsfield*, Bicheno*, Campbell Town*, Queenstown*, Scottsdale*, St Marys, Triabunna*, Whitemark). We have four on-site OSHC services (Evandale Primary, Hagley Farm, Invermay Primary, Westbury Primary) as well as a stand-alone OSHC service in Launceston that picks up from up to 11 schools and a statewide Family Day Care [FDC] Service. Thrive Group Tasmania has been operating since 1975 and is Tasmania's second-oldest FDC service. We support families and strengthen the foundations of our communities by delivering high-quality education and care services for children across Tasmania. The well-being and positive development of every child are at the heart of all our activities.

Lifting Literacy Lifting Tasmania Paper One: Setting the Scene – Feedback

As an Early Childhood Education and Care [ECEC] provider, our focus is on how to provide the best literacy start to children in the early years and how to help extend and promote literacy in the children who attend our OSHC programs. It is through this lens that the paper provided was read and through which our answers focus.

It is interesting to note that on page 12 of your document you mention that

Studies show there are a range of activities that parents do with their child that have a positive effect on their intellectual and social development.⁶ This includes, reading with the child, teaching songs and nursery rhymes, painting, and drawing, playing with letters and numbers, visiting the library, teaching the alphabet and numbers, taking children on visits, and creating regular opportunities for them to play with their friends at home.⁷

These are all experiences offered at Early Learning Services and yet arranging for these children to attend Early Learning Services is strangely not explored as an option in your results (Page 28) despite statistics showing that only 43.6% of Tasmanian children attend an ECEC. In fairness, the paper does refer to Early Learning programs (though ECEC services are not explicitly mentioned only government programs) and educating educators. I bring this to your attention, as the government so often sees the Sector as a Workforce solution and not as a vital part of children's educational journey and this has a flow-on effect on parents and families.

The vital 'first 1000 days' of a child's life ends at 2 Years and 270 days (under 9 months) yet many programs are aimed at three-year-olds, as this is the time children tend to show more

independence and Parents start wanting to get their children “ready” for school, so these are the programs that see the most success and therefore receive continued funding.

What is currently working well to improve literacy?

Attending one year of Education and care services has been shown to increase children’s grade three NAPLAN results by up to 20 points.

(<http://thespoke.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/naplan-underscores-the-importance-of-early-learning/>) This is proven to have a follow on effect all the way through to year 9.

Regardless of your opinion of NAPLAN, this shows the significant impact attending an ECEC service can have on a child’s education. At their presentation to the ECA Conference in 2019 Degortardi presented on how infants develop language in a social context needing both another participant and a topic of interest to converse about in order to best develop their language skills (Montag, Jones, & Smith, 2018). This is an area in which ECEC services do well as they provide experiences built on children’s interest and due National Regulations have time to interact and speak with all children.

From a school-aged perspective, we have found having local children’s authors visit, read to and work with children, even on their holidays, is a popular experience with the children and engages them as text users, creators and analysts. While initially, we feared this may seem more like a school activity to them we found engagement was high and the experiences led to children continuing to create their own books and other projects.

We have also found that having these authors create workshops around topics like engaging storytelling in our settings has been invaluable. It drives up engagement with both educators and children significantly. We find that most educators haven't been taught to be storytellers and it's not something that comes naturally to them. Through these sessions with local authors they have been able to attain additional professional development through observation and at times, direct interaction which has then led to improved and lasting engagement outcomes with children and our reading and literacy programs. A key issue that we have in this area is that we want to ensure that any local artists or authors are fairly remunerated for their work and it's difficult for us as an NFP to run these programs as they are comparatively quite cost-intensive (especially if needing to pay for travel and accommodation).

While it is important to continue to explore ways to increase literacy in Tasmania, we believe it is just as important to increase the funding, and access, to those programs that do work and that evidence supports as successful in supporting literacy. Increasing the access to ECEC for children 0-4 years old will not help those 5 years and older who are struggling now but it may be the long term solution to Tasmania’s Literacy crisis and is a program we can expand that will contribute to a long-term solution.

Considering the organizational map – What are the Gaps

An area where there are currently significant gaps is in the interlinking between the different services and programs. To maximise the effectiveness of each of these programs, they need to be aware of the activities being undertaken by the others and provide a seamless transition between

services. The ability to share information on children's needs has to be explicitly stated so that educators and services do not hold back information for fear of breaking Privacy laws. Either a change to how the law applies or a program that services can join where parents give permission for program partners to share information.

Considering the organizational map – What are the Opportunities

There are many missed opportunities in which services could be participating in shared or collaborative projects. As an example (from an Early Learning Perspective), high school students and teaching staff could be engaged in Early Learning programs in a way that benefits both cohorts of students, especially from performing art, creative and literacy perspectives. Older students could be encouraged to write stories for younger children, participate in a reading program or spend time with children exploring the child's interests. They could also write plays which could then be used in an Early Learning context with Educators taking the role of directors or participating in drama clubs in the school holidays.

There is also a lot more that could be done with local libraries from book reading events to multicultural celebrations that would reactivate these spaces as community hubs and cultivate a greater interest and exposure to books and reading.

Considering the organizational map – What supports need to be in place

A workaround for Privacy laws. For instance a program like Move Well Eat Well (Lets call it "Holistic Child Program") that Services could sign up for and have an information-sharing policy that covers all services involved. When parents sign their child up for a program they would give permission for the service to share their child's information with all services in the "Holistic Child Program" so that everyone has an understanding of where a specific child is. The program could ensure services meet a minimum standard for privacy as well as coordinate access for each service to specific children.

References

Montag, J.L, Jones, M.N., & Smith, L.B. (2018) Quantity and Diversity: Stimulating early word learning environments. *Cognitive Science*, 42(2), 375-412)