



Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc.

Lifting Literacy: Tasmania's Community-Wide Framework

March 2022



INTEGRITY
COMPASSION
INFLUENCE

About TasCOSS

TasCOSS's vision is for one Tasmania, free of poverty and inequality where everyone has the same opportunity. Our mission is two-fold: to act as the peak body for the community services industry in Tasmania; and to challenge and change the systems, attitudes and behaviours that create poverty, inequality and exclusion.

Our membership includes individuals and organisations active in the provision of community services to Tasmanians on low incomes or living in vulnerable circumstances. TasCOSS represents the interests of our members and their service users to government, regulators, the media and the public. Through our advocacy and policy development, we draw attention to the causes of poverty and disadvantage, and promote the adoption of effective solutions to address these issues.

Please direct any enquiries about this submission to:

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Chief Executive Officer

Introduction

TasCOSS welcomes a focus on literacy in Tasmania and particularly the development of a community-wide framework which recognises the importance of literacy throughout all stages of life. This is reflected in our consultations with Tasmanians about what they need for a good life, where they tell us they need literacy, numeracy as well as digital and other skills in a technology-rich world. They tell us that literacy is not just about reading and writing and occurs in a range of settings and across the life course.

Our consultations have also made it clear that literacy doesn't develop in a vacuum - as the discussion paper notes, social issues impact on people's ability to focus on their own, their children's and the literacy of people around them.¹ These issues include poverty, inadequate or insecure housing, trauma, lack of access to transport, poor health, and inadequate nutrition. They are, if you like, the social determinants of literacy.

The development of a Literacy Framework also comes at a time when education has been and continues to be disrupted by COVID. A number of reports show that students already experiencing disadvantage have had greater learning loss than their less-disadvantaged peers as a result of pandemic-related school closures and disruptions to learning.² This learning loss comes on top of existing poorer educational outcomes for Tasmanian students from low-socio economic backgrounds³ and added to the wider disproportionate impact of COVID on people and communities already experiencing disadvantage, while people and communities with higher levels of education and literacy fared relatively better in health and employment outcomes.⁴ All people and all communities must be as equipped as possible to withstand future challenges in an ever-changing global environment that requires us to adapt quickly to new ways of working and living. The Literacy Framework must therefore acknowledge that literacy is not a level playing field - an equity lens must be built into access to literacy programs in all their forms, across all life stages.

TasCOSS encourages the Advisory Panel to take an expansive lens to the kinds of actions that improve literacy by including services and programs that address the social determinants that affect literacy across the life course. That is the focus we adopt in this submission, noting that organisations such as 26TEN, Connect42 and 100% Literacy Alliance with expertise in the content of literacy and numeracy programs will make submissions on the Framework.

¹ [Paper One: Setting the Scene - Tasmania's Community-wide Framework \(dpac.tas.gov.au\)](#) p 28

² See for example UTAS 2020. [Learning from home](#), Grattan, 2020. [Covid Catch up](#) and UNESCO (2020a) [Adverse consequences of school closures](#).

³ Australian Government, Productivity Commission, Report on Government Services 2021- School Education, accessed at [4 School education - Report on Government Services Productivity Commission \(pc.gov.au\)](#); See also broader research showing children living in poverty generally have poorer educational outcomes than more advantaged children '[I just go to school with no food' – why Australia must tackle child poverty to improve educational outcomes \(theconversation.com\)](#)

⁴ [Voices from the COVID-19 Frontline Report | Brotherhood of St. Laurence \(bsl.org.au\)](#)

Key Issues

What is currently working well?

In this section we discuss initiatives that are working well but are not included in the discussion paper's 'organisational map'.

Working Together

TasCOSS believes the Tasmanian Government's Working Together initiative is an excellent example of an approach to learning that recognises some children and families need support to engage. TasCOSS was involved in the evaluation of the pilot phase which had demonstrable successes in attracting and retaining participants. In particular, the following aspects were highly valued by participants:

- Helping families understand and access the range of supports available to them
- Bringing families, engagement workers, early learning partners and other key supports to understand and address the drivers of wellbeing for the child and for the family
- Ensuring information and resources adhere to plain English guidelines
- Ensuring key documents and resources are translated into targeted languages, and access to interpreters are available if required
- Ensuring early learning settings are culturally safe
- Support for children and families at school transition points.

We believe the holistic support provided by Working together could be adapted and expanded to other years of schooling and other learning environments, including with a focus on literacy. Family literacy is a key to literacy development in early learning, school years, and adult learning.⁵

Food literacy

TasCOSS is a member of a group of organisations focused on achieving food security for all Tasmanians, the Tasmanian Food Security Coalition. This group feels strongly that food literacy should be named as a component of the literacy framework. Research shows that health and education are strongly connected, with children who are healthier achieving better educational outcomes.⁶ Evidence also suggests that programs aimed at food literacy can benefit literacy more broadly.

Recognising this important link between nutrition and learning, School Food Matters (formerly the School Canteen Association) introduced a School Lunch pilot program in 15 Tasmanian public schools. The program is based on international research and evidence showing a range of benefits, including to learning, of children being fed nutritious meals while at school. The pilot evaluation confirmed

⁵ See for example [Parent and Family Engagement: An implementation guide for school communities \(aracy.org.au\)](https://aracy.org.au/parent-and-family-engagement)

⁶ See for example 'Health, academic achievement and school-based interventions,' in *Health and Academic Achievement*, 2018 [Health, Academic Achievement and School-Based Interventions | IntechOpen](#)

numerous benefits of the program, including increased school attendance. It also highlighted an increased level of engagement, both from students and families, as well as from the wider community. Strengthening the connections between children and families and their communities can play a key role in supporting learning.⁷

Other Tasmanian examples include the ‘Greater than garlic’ course, run by Scrubby Hill Farm in conjunction with 26TEN and Libraries Tasmania, which teaches maths alongside garlic growing knowledge.⁸ Families Tasmania (formerly the Child Health Association of Tasmania) worked with 26TEN to develop a resource called ‘Kitchen ABC/123’⁹ which builds numeracy skills into its recipes and food preparation materials. It’s used in a variety of settings to support food literacy.

Elsewhere, the Victorian State Government introduced a teacher resource guide to teach Healthy Eating and Food Literacy in secondary schools because it recognised that food literacy knowledge and skills ‘can support learning and skill development across a range of learning areas/subjects.’¹⁰

Health literacy and digital health literacy

Digital health literacy is a relatively new concept within the health and community service arenas, due to rapid mobilisation spurred by COVID-19. Research from TasCOSS suggests that digital service delivery models (e.g., Zoom, telephone for appointments) generally improve service delivery for consumers and providers. Providers are able to improve their digital skills, more consumers can be reached, and online appointments are quite convenient. However, not all Tasmanians have this experience. Access, affordability, and digital ability issues are evident particularly for people who are disproportionately impacted. These impacts include the cost of devices, data access, low digital literacy skills, service navigation, and the user experience of online appointments.

Providers need support to help their consumers become more health literate to enable digital-friendly services. This includes building understanding about how digital inclusion is experienced and becoming a “digital-friendly service.” One such program, the HeLLoTas! Toolkit – Building a Health Literate Learning Organisation Tasmania – helps organisations to consider their own organisational health literacy.¹¹ TasCOSS recommends that HeLLoTas! is included in the map of existing activity.

Other opportunities

Through our discussions with members, communities, and through our research, we have identified the following opportunities for action.

⁷ [Microsoft Word - Evaluation of 2020 School Lunch Pilot Final.1.docx \(schoolfoodmatters.org.au\)](#)

⁸ [Scrubby Hill Farm Market Garden - Home | Facebook](#)

⁹ <https://www.familiestasmania.org.au/resources/kitchen-abc-123/>

¹⁰ [Healthy Eating and Food Literacy - FUSE - Department of Education & Training](#)

¹¹ [Step 2: Assessing your organisation's health literacy | HeLLo Tas](#)

Public education

- An increase in state funding for government schools to or beyond the minimum (80%) Resourcing Standard to provide appropriate facilities and resources, training and support for educators and other staff
- Additional support for students needing assessments in order to access a learning plan
- Create opportunities for early, voluntary intervention in educational settings with families and children who have complex needs, to assist with literacy and numeracy and deliver broader learning and developmental benefits
- Expansion of cultural awareness and competence training for teachers and school staff
- Expansion of and increased funding for Aboriginal education programs
- A greater collaborative partnership approach between learners, educators and the broader community with a focus on wellbeing and integrated, holistic support and planning – Working Together is a model that could be adapted and expanded beyond early education
- Providing all secondary students with laptops/devices and data for those who cannot afford data
- Provision of free and flexible transport options for students
- Universal school food programs¹²

Lifelong learning

- Consider adopting relevant recommendations of the 2022 House of Representatives inquiry into adult literacy¹³
- Community-based guidance and referral services to offer timely, accessible and accurate guidance for learners including tuition and referrals, in addition to the literacy services offered by Libraries Tasmania (recognising that Libraries are not accessible for various reasons for all Tasmanians)
- Investing in and expanding 26TEN initiatives to ensure greater access to literacy, numeracy and digital support
- Greater utilisation of peer-learning methods for adult learners
- Expansion of the use of evidence-based approaches in education and literacy programs
- Increased resourcing of early years interventions to give children the best start possible.

Digital Inclusion

- Expand Digital Ready for Daily Life initiatives to ensure greater access to digital support
- Ensure any expansion of digital services, particularly government services, is first tested with users to enable access for people with varying levels of digital access and skills
- Co-locate community-based digital coaches with training and employment hubs.

¹² As proposed by School Food Matters

¹³ [Don't take it as read \(aph.gov.au\)](https://aph.gov.au/Don't%20take%20it%20as%20read)

Recommendations

TasCOSS recommends that:

1. The Framework recognises the social determinants of literacy
2. An equity lens must be built into access to literacy programs in all their forms, across all life stages
3. The 'map' of literacy activity, and any actions in the Framework, need to be broader than reading and writing and encompass a variety of forms of literacy, including food literacy, digital literacy and health literacy
4. The Framework should acknowledge the opportunities to achieve better literacy outcomes from increased investment in public schools and supports especially for children who are developmentally vulnerable or otherwise living in vulnerable circumstances
5. The Framework needs to ensure initiatives to improve literacy are culturally appropriate for all Tasmanians at all life stages
6. Ensure all literacy programs are grounded in evidence and/or promising practice

In addition:

Public education

7. An increase in state funding for government schools to or beyond the minimum (80%) Resourcing Standard to provide appropriate facilities and resources, training and support for educators and other staff
8. Additional support for students needing assessments in order to access a learning plan
9. Create opportunities for early, voluntary intervention in educational settings with families and children who have complex needs, to assist with literacy and numeracy and deliver broader learning and developmental benefits
10. Expansion of cultural awareness and competence training for teachers and school staff
11. Expansion of and increased funding for Aboriginal education programs
12. A greater collaborative partnership approach between learners, educators and the broader community with a focus on wellbeing and integrated, holistic support and planning – Working Together is a model that could be adapted and expanded beyond early education
13. Providing all secondary students with laptops/devices and data for those who cannot afford data
14. Provision of free and flexible transport options for students
15. Universal school food programs¹⁴

Lifelong learning

16. Consider adopting relevant recommendations of the 2022 House of Representatives inquiry into adult literacy
17. Community-based guidance and referral services to offer timely, accessible and accurate guidance for learners including tuition and referrals, in addition to the literacy services offered by Libraries Tasmania (recognising that Libraries are not accessible for various reasons for all Tasmanians)

¹⁴ As proposed by School Food Matters

- 18. Investing in and expanding 26TEN initiatives to ensure greater access to literacy, numeracy and digital support
- 19. Greater utilisation of peer-learning methods for adult learners
- 20. Expansion of the use of evidence-based approaches in education and literacy programs
- 21. Increased resourcing of early years interventions to give children the best start possible.

Digital Inclusion

- 22. Expand Digital Ready for Daily Life initiatives to ensure greater access to digital support
- 23. Ensure any expansion of digital services, particularly government services, is first tested with users to enable access for people with varying levels of digital access and skills
- 24. Co-locate community-based digital coaches with training and employment hubs.