

21 January 2020

Productivity Commission  
4 National Circuit  
Barton ACT 2600

Dear Commissioner,

### **Comments on Draft Inquiry Report on Mental Health from Raise Foundation**

Raise Foundation welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into the Economic and Social Impact of Mental Health.

This letter outlines recommendations which we believe is directly relevant to the Inquiry, illustrates the impact we deliver in the prevention and early intervention of mental illness for young people, and the important evidence-based outcomes that we achieve for young Australians. We are grateful for the opportunity to have our voice considered in the finalising of the Report, and we hope you will take into consideration our recommendations for the inclusion of best practice programs in schools as an early intervention and prevention strategy of youth mental illness.

As part of the Australia 2030 vision, we believe that best practice youth mentoring should be available in all public secondary schools across our country for Year 8 students, as an effective early intervention strategy for those most at risk of poor wellbeing or disengagement. Mental illness tends to first emerge in younger people, raising the importance of identifying risk factors and treating illness early.

### **Relativity to the Initial Report**

Our submission relates to the following themes and recommendations in the initial report:

- Normalisation of help seeking behaviour
- Appropriate early intervention and prevention strategies for young people
- Education based intervention targeting specific risk factors such as bullying, resilience, stress, confidence, engagement
- Skills development of parents and adults across the community to provide effective support for young people
- Shift in social norms around mental health and suicide prevention reducing stigma

We are pleased to see the following recommendations and themes listed in the Overview and Recommendations of the Draft Report which we support, and our submission relates to these concepts, including:

Reform Area 1 - prevention and early intervention for mental illness and suicide attempts:

- Support for children's social and emotional wellbeing in schools
- Proactive outreach services for students disengaged with school
- Links in schools to mental health support services from the local community

Reform Area 4 - assistance for people with mental illness to find employment

Draft Recommendation 17.3 - social and emotional learning programs in the Education System:

- Assist schools to provide an effective social and emotional learning curriculum
- Training for teachers on mentoring skills

Draft Recommendation 17.4 - educational support for children with mental illness:

- Funding for outreach services supporting students who have disengaged from education
- Expansion of services to support students who are at risk of disengagement from their schooling
- Provide support to a dedicated school wellbeing leader (Raise provides an extra 15 hours per week to students)
- Additional funding for schools for investment in social and emotional wellbeing

Draft Recommendation 20.1 – National Stigma Reduction Strategy

- promote meaningful interactions between people with and without mental illness
- stigma reduction messages
- social inclusion reform objective to reduce stigma in the community for people who don't complete secondary school

Draft Finding 21.2 – School based awareness programs can be cost-effective

- school based suicide and self-harm prevention awareness program is a cost-effective strategy

Special Note

There is much discussion about online services throughout the Recommendations, and while highly valuable, Raise also believes there is much value in preparing young people for a mentally healthy future by encouraging them to develop competent interpersonal skills, conducting face to face conversations, and engaging in positive human interaction, all skills which quality mentoring will develop.

**Why Raise Foundation Exists**

As you are aware, many young people in Australia are not okay. Suicide is the highest reason for death in young people and 1 in 4 have a mental health condition, yet only 36% will ask for help. 1 in 10 young people are completely disengaged from education, employment and training, and 1 in 3 young people are without adequate work. This is not okay. The catalyst to Raise Foundation was the death by suicide of a 14 year old family friend. Raise exists to help address youth mental health.

Raise Foundation is a powerful youth mentoring movement which is creating thriving communities across Australia. Raise impacts youth wellbeing and engagement through early intervention, evidence based mentoring programs in high schools and communities. We are empowering young people to become resilient, capable and connected, and ensuring that they feel heard, valued and supported. The power of having someone neutral to talk to, who really listens and actually hears you, is extraordinary. Raise Mentors can change thinking and save lives.

The top 7 issues that our mentees face are:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Bullying
- Illness in Family
- Suicidal thoughts or attempts
- Self Harm
- Financial Hardship

Research shows that young people with a mentor are more likely to<sup>i</sup>:

- suffer less depression
- experience greater wellbeing
- find emotional support
- have greater resilience
- have higher confidence
- finish high school
- find employment
- progress in their career path

### **Raise Foundation Overview**

We have an urgent social problem and Raise Foundation's proven in-school mentoring programs are an effective solution. Raise Foundation's early intervention model helps to address significant social issues such as youth mental illness, early school leaving and youth unemployment, which result in lost earnings of up to \$11.3bn<sup>ii</sup>.

Raise Foundation's purpose is to empower young Australians who are at risk of disengagement to become more resilient, capable and connected by delivering best practice mentoring programs in high schools. Raise is creating thriving communities by connecting almost 4,000 trained volunteer mentors with more than 5,400 young people in need over the past 11 years. In 2019, Raise mentored just under 1,000 young people, and in 2020 Raise will mentor another 1,500 young people in 100 secondary schools across 6 Australian states.

### **Best Practice Youth Mentoring**

Raise is an industry leader in the delivery of one-on-one, face-to-face mentoring programs for young people in Australian high schools who are at risk of poor wellbeing and disengagement. Raise is committed to best practice, being a youth safe organisation and meeting or exceeding the Australian Youth Mentoring Network benchmarks and international research standards. Our programs support young people to develop:

- resilience
- confidence
- goal setting
- help seeking behaviour
- strong community relationships
- hope for the future
- belief in their ability to finish school
- belief in their ability to find employment

which are all critical to improving youth mental wellbeing, and setting young people on a positive pathway through school and life. Our key differentiators include:

- 12 hours of mentor training (6 hours online and 6 hours face to face)
- evidence based 6-month program curriculum delivered weekly
- weekly supervision by our qualified Program Counsellors
- comprehensive evaluation process to prove and improve our impact
- comparably low match cost

## Creating Thriving Communities

Part of Raise Foundation's aim is to support the communities across Australia, in which young people live, to thrive across generations. We are doing this by providing thousands of adult volunteers across the country with comprehensive training to become qualified youth mentors, along with a lived experience of supporting a young person who is struggling with poor wellbeing and disengagement.

The skills that Raise Mentors develop are highly valuable as a volunteer in their local community, but they are also highly valuable for use in their own personal lives with their children, family and friends. Alongside this, these adults are also developing exceptional mentoring and leadership skills which are transferable into their workplaces and professional lives. They develop better listening skills, higher emotional intelligence, a greater ability to empathise with those around them, a capacity to ask more effective questions, and a comfortable knowledge on where to find help for people who need care.

Those who come to us to become Raise Mentors include parents of primary and secondary school children, students at universities who are studying education or psychology, corporate employees, older people who are retired, young adults who are not able to find work but have time to volunteer, people who are working part time, people who are looking to contribute to their community, teachers who want to upskill in mentoring ability, and the list goes on. Everyone can train to be a Raise Mentor and make a real difference.

Raise Foundation is creating thriving communities across Australia.

## Evidence Based Impact

Aligning with our Theory of Change model, we seek statistically significant improvements for our young people in the domains of social-emotional learning, cognitive development, identity development and school engagement.

The benefits of a safe space to practice and extend these skills with a supportive adult are extraordinary, as our evaluation results have consistently demonstrated over the past 11 years. We are currently analysing our evaluation data from 2019. In 2018, Raise achieved statistically significant improvements in 9 of the 12 mentee outcomes we set out to achieve in our Ismo programs.

Results from our evaluations and emerging evidence in the youth mentoring industry suggest that mentees who had close relationships that also incorporate aspects of upskilling such as goal-setting, emotion regulation and self-regulation strategies were more likely to experience stronger and longer lasting outcomes. As part of our continual improvement process, we developed pilot curriculums which were tested in 2019, and will inform improvements for our curriculum in 2020.

We work in partnership with external organisations on industry research such as universities and the Centre for Social Impact. Our program maps onto the Australian Curriculum Personal and Social Capability framework. We are listed on the Be You website managed by Beyond Blue, and we are listed on the NSW Prequalification Panel of Providers for secondary schools.

Australian Philanthropic Services (APS) recently evaluated our program for the Future Generation Company as part of an audit of their 13 chosen charities, and we were ranked first across the whole group.

Our most recent Annual Report which outlines our evaluation and impact is available [at this link](#) and is an attachment.

Our research shows [consistent statistically significant improvements](#) in social and emotional outcomes such as the following, which buffer the impact of suicide ideation and bullying<sup>iii</sup>.



- confidence
- communication skills
- coping when things go wrong
- relationship with teachers
- resilience
- help seeking behaviour
- belief in ability to finish school
- hope for the future

Raise conducts pre- and post-mentoring studies which include psychometrically sound measures to prove (and improve) the impact we are having in the areas above. The evaluation process for our mentees also includes three key voices in our programs – the mentees themselves, the mentors, and our school partners. This triangulation of mentee outcomes supports the validity of our findings, and a summary is below.

School Outcomes	Mentee Outcomes	Mentor Outcomes
100% schools would like to participate again 100% reported improved resilience in mentees 97% said mentees improved ability to set goals 97% reported improved confidence 94% rated program excellent (6% very good) 83% reported improved attendance 83% improved classroom engagement 82% said it supported their wellbeing team 77% reported lower levels of truanting	99% enjoyed the program 97% would recommend to a friend 93% made better choices 92% feel better about school 86% feel better about themselves 82% feel more connected 80% likely to continue with school 77% set a goal to achieve	98% feel contributed to community 95% sense of purpose 93% improved listening skills 81% improved leadership skills 70% likely to stay with employer 68% applied mentoring at work 68% improved parenting skills 67% feel engaged with employer

### Ability to Scale our Mentoring Programs to Accelerate Impact

Raise mentoring programs work<sup>iv</sup> and we consider it our responsibility to make them available in every public high school in Australia, prioritising 15,000 young people most at risk of poor wellbeing and disengagement<sup>v</sup>. We are ready and committed to deliver our Strategic Impact Plan developed through a pro-bono project with McKinsey and Co and our Patron’s Advisory Council, chaired by David Gonski AC.

To date, our programs (15 matches per school) have each cost over \$30,000 pa. However, a step improvement through capacity building (of people, process, technology) will see us optimise the investment to \$15,000 pa for each additional program. In 2020, we will organically grow by 50% to 1,500 mentee matches. Raise has a proven track record in raising funds successfully through Government support, matched funding through the Private sector, contribution from schools, along with support from the private philanthropy space. Continued co-investment will see our ability to scale across the whole country.

Our Strategic Impact Plan sees the large-scale roll out of our best practice mentoring programs to every public secondary school in Australia in the five years to 2024. In doing so, we aim to achieve educational equity by providing a pathway to reengagement for young people who are currently being left behind in our Australian high schools. These include young people experiencing conflict, trauma, mental ill-health and marginalisation (e.g. Indigenous and CaLD young people, young people who are carers, living with a disability or from low socio-economic backgrounds).

Evidence shows that students need to be in a frame of mind conducive to learning in order to develop academically and yet not all students can leave behind the broader adversities they face outside the learning environment. Mentoring builds a young person's resilience, connection and wellbeing strategies to help them resolve their personal barriers to engagement, whatever they may be.

The recent Gonski 2.0 Australian Government Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools recommended increasing school-community engagement through mentoring to respond to identified student need, improve the relevance of learning, and to support personal development and student learning growth. Raise Foundation's youth mentoring program was highlighted in the Gonski 2.0 recommendations as a best practice example.

## **Outcomes and Impacts of our Strategic Impact Plan**

### **Outcome 1**

Improvement in wellbeing and educational outcomes (behaviour, mental health, help seeking, attendance, academic confidence, ability to finish school) of those students currently most at risk of disengagement and being left behind in Australian high schools. We will do this by delivering mentoring programs to these high school students in order to:

- provide a pathway to build a young person's resilience, connection and wellbeing strategies
- support young people to resolve their personal barriers to engagement
- directly develop a young person's skills for re-engagement in education and future employment

#### Output

The mentoring program will be made available to year 8 students with an identified need nominated by the school wellbeing team in every public high school across Australia. Availability to all public secondary schools will be staged in order to ensure continued high-quality delivery, with 5 years being the optimal timeframe for full availability to 15,000+ students (15 most at risk Year 8 students in all 1036 public secondary schools). Diversity in geographies to build the evidence base will be incorporated in the staged roll-out. The take-up by high schools will be subject to availability of complementary funding.

### **Outcome 2**

Maximising impact through informed concentration of effort. We will do this by using the staged roll out of the mentoring program to evaluate its effectiveness on:

1. different geographies (metro, regional, rural) / (states and territories)
2. different types of student adversity

#### Output

A longitudinal evaluation using a mixed methods approach including broad surveying of schools and students across different geographies as well as qualitative longitudinal tracking of students.

### **Outcome 3**

Building intergenerational community support structures. We will do this through the large-scale delivery of industry-leading mentor training to volunteers across Australia who will then be equipped to mentor in the high school programs as well as in their own personal and professional lives.

Output:

At full scale 15,000+ trained volunteers will be mentoring high school students every year. Our evaluation study will also include output from longitudinal qualitative interviews with mentors to explore the impact of being a mentor at the individual, familial, and community levels.

**Outcome 4**

Ensuring sustainability of the solution. We will do this by proving the benefits of the mentoring to schools, corporates, philanthropic partners and Government who will contribute to ongoing program support and costs.

Output:

We will produce robust evidence and recommendations to Government and schools and provide schools with the tools to identify and leverage their local community support structures.

**Collaboration with other Early Intervention Providers in Schools**

Raise has commenced pulling together a group of aligned for-purpose organisations for greater effectiveness for our young mentees and efficiencies for our funders. This is to eliminate the range of disparate not-for-profit organisations that are trying to seek funding and support from Government and Corporate organisations for their programs. We know there are many small-medium community organisations competing for the same funding, who are all trying to achieve similar outcomes. If we can all gather together, with a commitment to delivering best practice, evidence-based, early intervention programs in secondary schools, in a consistent and meaningful way, then together we can make a much greater impact for, and reach a much greater number of, young people struggling with mental illness.

We are leading the reconvention of the Australian Youth Mentoring Network, a collection of organisations who provide mentoring programs which meet or exceed the 10 youth mentoring Benchmarks. We are also liaising with aligned organisations also working in schools such as Batyr (lived experience workshops), Headspace (counselling support), ABCN (employment focus), BBBS (Victoria), EdConnect (Western Australia), other Youth Frontiers providers in NSW (YWCA, MTC, Save The Children), Youth Opportunities (South Australia), Top Blokes (male focus), The Smith Family (disadvantaged families), and Mission Australia (major annual youth survey).

We are planning to host a collaboration workshop to explore these opportunities to work together in February 2020, with the support of the Origin Foundation and the Centre for Social Impact. We have spoken with the Gonski Institute and the Grattan Institute about ongoing research and evaluation initiatives, such as conducting randomised control group studies. Raise is searching for partners who could, with us, pull together a more compelling proposition for major funding support and work with the Mental Health Commission as an approver of funding. Our relationship with the Future Generation Companies is a powerful relationship, which could enable us to build an effective model.

Our purpose is around supporting young people to achieve mental health and wellbeing, so we are looking at that ecosystem and the supply chain, putting this at the centre of our planning. We are taking a holistic approach attracting community, corporate, government and private philanthropy to match funding, creating a different way to make better impact, while ensuring we have consistent buy in and robust risk strategy. We plan to create a shared third space, so all of the partners are bringing something to the solution, which is not something that any one of us would do on our own.

## **Sustainability**

Raise is committed to improving the wellbeing of our young people through proving the benefits of our mentoring programs to schools, volunteers, funding partners and the Government. Participating schools become champions of the program and we provide them with the tools to identify and leverage their local community support structures in order to contribute to ongoing program support and costs.

On the basis of our outcomes and proven impact, our supporting partners provide consistent volunteering, in-kind and funding support. We receive extraordinary support from well-established Australian corporate organisations and highly accomplished business people. We have received funding from the NSW Government for the past 5 years as part of the Youth Frontiers mentoring program, highlighting our ability to work closely within policy and systems of Government.

Our Board is highly experienced in community and commercial activities, and we have the support of our Patron's Advisory Council, chaired by David Gonski AC, as well as many well-known and highly reputable Ambassadors. Our staff team is highly professional and qualified, and is well set up for growth and impact on scale. The development of our Strategic Impact Plan 2019-2024 with a pro-bono team from McKinsey and Co has given us a road map to achieve our goal of providing best practice mentoring in every public secondary school, prioritising those most at risk of poor wellbeing and disengagement.

Designing these ongoing sustainability options ensures the program is embraced and continues into the future. Together, we can change the landscape of our country by providing this evidence based, early intervention program for young people who are at risk of, or experiencing, mental illness.

## **Raise Foundation Recommendations**

1. Continue to acknowledge the importance of early intervention and prevention of youth mental illness, and consider priorities for young people aged 12-14 years
2. Include best practice mentoring programs in schools as an early intervention strategy to support young people at risk of poor wellbeing and disengagement, and ensure they have a strong evidence base to prove and improve their impact
3. Encourage Government co-funding, matched by corporate, philanthropy and community, to bring best practice mentoring programs into every public secondary school in Australia

We look forward to working with you on this very important issue, and I am happy to discuss at any time.

Yours sincerely  
**Raise Foundation**

**Vicki Condon AM**  
Founder and CEO

## Referees

[David Gonski AC](#) – leading Australian businessman, Chairman, Board Director, and Raise Patron

[Lisa Paul AO](#) – Chair of Headspace, ex Secretary Department of Education and Training, and Raise Advisor

[Shemara Wikramanyake](#) – CEO Macquarie Bank, and Raise Advisor

[David Thodey](#) – Chair of CSIRO, leading businessman, and Mentor to our CEO

[Louise Walsh](#) – CEO of Future Generation Companies, FGX and FGG, of which we are a beneficiary

[Kristy Muir](#) – CEO of Centre for Social Impact at UNSW, ex Board Director of AYMN

[Adrian Piccoli](#) – CEO of Gonski Institute, ex NSW Minister for Education

## Attachments (confidential)

Australian Department of Health Presentation – October 2019

Evaluation and Annual Report – March 2019

Raise Foundation Strategic Impact Plan – May 2019

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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> DuBois and Silverthorn

<sup>ii</sup> Centre for Social Impact, UNSW, “Youth Mentoring Pathways to Economic and Social Outcomes”, Dr Kristy Muir, 2018

<sup>iii</sup> Siegmann et al, 2018; Huen et al, 2015

<sup>iv</sup> Our detailed [2018 Evaluation and Annual Report](#) outlines the impact we have, along with our 2017 Ernst & Young Social Impact Study and other independent research and evaluation in which Raise has participated, and all documents are available upon request

<sup>v</sup> Raise Foundation’s “Strategic Impact Plan 2019-2024”, developed in consultation with McKinsey and Co. in early 2018 and refined through assumption testing over the past 12 months, is available upon request.