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Cairns Centacare FNQ looking to expand School Savvy back to school program across Queensland

A new performance report on one of the state's most innovative back-to-school program reveals more than 16,400 students and 7,800 families across far north and central Queensland have been help cover back-to-school costs since 2017.

The School Savvy, back to school program, provides families on low incomes or in financial difficulties with low-cost school uniforms and other school essentials.

The program, which was developed by Centacare Far North Queensland in 2017, was taken up by CatholicCare Central Queensland in Rockhampton in 2019 and by Centacare North Queensland in Townsville in 2021.

Centacare FNQ Executive Director, Ms Anita Veivers, and the Chair of Catholic Social Services Australia, Mr Francis Sullivan, have now written the State Education Minister, Ms Grace Grace, requesting funding to engage a full-time coordinator for three years to roll the program out to other regions across Queensland.

Ms Veivers said the program has been a huge success with more and more families reaching out every year.

"Community support and engagement remains strong and there is growing demand from both large and small regional areas to take advantage of the many benefits the program offers low-income communities.

"The program isn't just about uniforms and school supplies. A child is more likely to disengage from school if they don't have the food, clothes, and other supplies they need. Being ill prepared for school can impact their development, education and eventually employment outcomes," she said.

Chair of Catholic Social Services Australia, Francis Sullivan, said never before have the demands on services offered by Centacare FNQ been so great and the call out from vulnerable and disadvantaged communities been so loud.

"Services such as Centacare FNQ are increasingly filling the gap left by governments that face increasing budget constraints and communities that, year on year, see the value of their pay packets or benefits get smaller and smaller," Mr Sullivan said.

Today's announcement was made at the Cairns Colonial Club Resort where senior executives from the Catholic Social Services Australia network are meeting for the CSSA National Conference.

Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) is the national body representing more than 15,000 workers and volunteers in some 650 locations throughout Australia.

Member organisations providing social and community services reaching more than one million vulnerable Australians through 300 different service offerings each year including aged care, NDIS and emergency support.

Media Contact:

Centacare FNQ Anna Rogers 0407 307 337

CSSA Michael Salmon 0417 495 018