

School Savvy

A back-to-school student support program initiated by Centacare Far North Queensland

Performance report and funding request

Overview

The School Savvy program helps students and families on lower incomes or with ongoing financial difficulties start the new school year with low-cost school uniforms and other back-to-school equipment.

Centacare Far North Queensland initiated the program in Cairns in 2017.

Other Catholic social services providers in Queensland have now taken up the program, including CatholicCare Central Queensland, based in Rockhampton in 2019, and Centacare North Queensland, based in Townsville in 2021.

Since the program started in 2017, the data indicates that School Savvy has provided 16,438 students and 7,797 families with support and help to cover the costs of starting the school year across these three regions.

A large percentage of these families, up to 30%, across these regions are from First Nations communities.

School Savvy:

- Collects and redistributes pre-loved uniforms to families in need.
- Takes donations of educational resources.
- Provides basic packs of stationery.
- Recycles unwanted educational supplies and uniforms for children who need them.
- Provides value-added services in partnership with local business communities, such as financial advice and haircuts.

How the program differs from other social services offerings

The program is different from other school support services provided by organisations such as the Smith Family. A key point of difference is School Savvy generates a community response to a large group of children and their families rather than seeking donations to provide financial support to a small number of individual children

In Cairns, for example, utilising \$15,000 to support almost 1,000 children means families in the community are supported at the start of each school year. With average resources provided to each child valued at more than \$100, the total benefit of those funds is magnified almost eight times.

The value of early student enrolments to the Department of Education Queensland cannot be underestimated.

Supporting difficult-to-engage families at the start of each school year helps provide clarity around student numbers prior to the day eight census. Schools can receive more accurate funding through children's attendance early in the school year by including students who may not be counted in school numbers until they have their back-to-school basics.

How the program works

School Savvy provides support by collecting donations of new and pre-loved uniform items and school supplies and by partnering with local community organisations and businesses.

The organisers then set up 'pop-up' stores in the lead-up to the start of the school year so students and families can buy cheap, high-quality uniforms and other school supplies, usually with nothing more than a gold coin donation.

This year pop-up shops were set up by Centacare FNQ in Manunda and in Innisfail. Almost 1,000 students were supported this year through these two shops.

The program was taken up by Centacare North Queensland in Townsville in 2021, where this year, it supported 2,000 plus students from 754 families.

The program started in Rockhampton (by CatholicCare Central Queensland) in 2019 and has extended to Yeppoon, Gracemere, Mount Morgan, Bundaberg, Childers, and Gin Gin, helping almost 1,200 students from more than 650 families this year.

School Savvy Community partnerships

School Savvy works in partnership with local community organisations and businesses.

This year, Centacare FNQ worked with major partners such as St Vincent de Paul Society, Tosco Office National, Pacifica Chartered Accountants, Grant Thornton Australia, Orange Sky Laundry in Cairns, AlSCO Linen Pacific Toyota, Queensland Country Bank, QStars, and UnitingCare. Local hairdressers also provided back-to-school haircuts.

One of the key partnerships is provided by local laundry services Orange Sky Laundry and AlSCO Linen. This year AlSCO Linen, a commercial operation, washed dried, and steamed 650 kilos of uniforms for their new owners in just two days.

Another key partnership is with Pacific Toyota, which promotes School Savvy through its Loan Applications (Suncorp), which provides an ongoing income each year as well as supplying a van to pick up and drop off donation bins, uniforms, and school supplies across the region.

Benefits

Access to Education is the key developmental opportunity we provide to children at a community level. Having the appropriate resources to engage in that education can make the difference for a child at risk of disengaging.

A key mechanism for children to move forward from disadvantage is through education; as a community, we need to ensure all children have the opportunity to engage, participate and thrive in their educational setting, regardless of their barriers.

We know that by maintaining students' engagement in school we provide a platform for positive long-term learning and active community participation. The long-term benefits of maintaining engagement in school lead to a higher likelihood of participation in higher education and the workforce, and a flow-on benefit that lessens the vulnerability and disadvantage experienced by families in our community.

School Savvy offers a non-threatening soft entry point to families who may be disengaged from their child's schooling. Working with the Department of Education Queensland and other community providers facilitate a holistic approach to supporting families in identifying and address barriers to their child's education.

Cost of running the program – Far North Queensland

In 2019/2020 the total operating expenses for the program in the Far North Queensland region (CentacareFNQ) were \$34,722.

Total income for that year was \$34,030 made up of donations from commercial partners, gold coin contributions, and a significant bequest from the Cairns Catholic Diocese.

Request to Queensland State Government

Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA10, which is the peak organisation representing Catholic social service providers across Australia, recognises the School Savvy program as an important and effective approach to helping low-income families meet back-to-school costs and keeping young students and families engaged with the education system.

It is a model that, for six years has been run as a volunteer and community-based support program drawing on the goodwill of local individuals, businesses, and other social service providers.

Its effectiveness is demonstrated by the increasing number of families that access the service each year and its expansion into other regions in Queensland.

While the costs of running the program are not high, for a relatively low-income organisation such as Centacare FNQ, these costs are a considerable investment in time and money.

With additional investment, the opportunity to leverage relationships with hard-to-reach families and engage as a soft entry point to additional essential services to support schooling cannot be underestimated. School Savvy plays an important role in creating a local “village” to support families raising their children and getting to school with the resources they need to learn.

School savvy has facilitated support for children and families at a local, place-based community level, bringing to life the concept that it takes a village to raise a child. The school-savvy concept is simple and transferable but requires coordination to make local-level connections and networks to support the development of place-based pop-ups.

CSSA would like the Queensland State Government to consider providing short-term funding to employ a School Savvy program coordinator for three years to develop the School Savvy program into a state-wide initiative that could be rolled out into other Queensland regions.

This coordinator would be responsible for developing materials to promote the scheme, advising other regions on implementing the scheme and playing an active role in ensuring the schemes in other regions are well operated with appropriate governance and budgeting. The coordinator would initially work out of Centacare FNQ as a paid employee.

Funding Required

Staffing	1 FTE Coordinator level 5 .5 FTE Support staff level 3	\$110,000 \$50,000
Overheads @18% of salaries		\$28,800
Resources	Marketing material/ misc start up support	\$15,000
Travel	Travel expenses	\$15,000
Total		\$218,000 per annum

School Savvy Performance data

The following tables tracks the take-up of the program across the three regions where it is currently operating and the number of students and families it has assisted. The totals are cumulative and indicates the number of students and families that were assisted in each particular year. Some of the same students and families may have been supported over several years.

The data indicates that from 2017 to 2022 School Savvy has supported and helped cover the costs of 16,438 school students and 7,797 families starting the school year.

	Centacare Far North Queensland		CatholicCare Central Queensland		Centacare North Queensland	
	Students	Families	Students	Families	Students	Families
2017	1000+ Approx.	579				
2018	2000+ Approx.	1000				
2019	1279	563	725	408		
2020	1146	510	1100	624		
2021	1201	591	1100 Approx.	570 Approx.	2750	1077
2022	972	470	1165	651	2000	754
Total	7598	3713	4090	2253	4750	1831

Aggregate totals

	Students	Families
Centacare Far North Queensland 2017 to 2022	7,598	3,713
CatholicCare Central Queensland 2019 to 2022	4,090	2,253
Centacare North Queensland 2021 to 2022	4,750	1,831
Total	16,438	7,797

