

# The Salvation Army Literacy Advisory Panel Submission



March 2022

The Salvation Army recognises the importance of literacy as a pathway out of poverty for the community. Both the STeP123 Literacy Project and Communities for Children South East Tasmania deliver projects and activities for improving literacy for all ages. Both programs produce literacy resources, run literacy workshops and family literacy projects. See information below for more details:

## **The Salvation Army – STeP123 Literacy Project**

### Literacy to tackle poverty – an overview of STeP123 Literacy Project

Tasmania, having the highest rate of poverty in Australia, prompted The Salvation Army (TSA) to introduce its STeP123 Literacy program 13 years ago, with the aim of creating pathways out of poverty. With support from various benefactors and funding sources, STeP123 has provided people of all ages with competencies in emotional, functional and computer literacy. *Reading Together* and *Card Buddies* projects are currently being implemented to help STeP123 pursue equal opportunity for literacy.

### **Literacy Messages from The Salvation Army STeP123 Literacy research:**

- There are very strong links to poverty in families where literacy levels are low.
- Investing in literacy projects is an early intervention approach to prevent further disadvantage and poverty.
- Supporting parents with low literacy levels encourages them to read and engage with their children.
- There is a relationship between parents' level of education and literacy and the literacy skills and school performance of their children.
- 48% of all Tasmanians do not have enough literacy, numeracy and digital skills to function effectively in today's society.
- This percentage is increased within The Salvation Army client group where a very high percentage of clients have low literacy, numeracy and digital skill levels.

For the first 3 years of funding (2009-2012), of the STeP123 Literacy project, the focus was to research, trial and develop a range of literacy tools and strategies that targeted people who do not have access to other literacy programs. Also, other short-term funding from various sources has been made available since 2013 to continue STeP123 Literacy research and development of literacy programs targeting clients presenting to TSA. Noting that there is a direct link between education and poverty, where poverty rates decrease markedly with higher educational level attainment, in general, people with low levels of education are more likely to be unemployed, and thus more likely to experience poverty and hardship than those with higher levels of education.

The STeP123 Literacy rationale concludes that literacy programs and activities targeting clients that have low levels of literacy who are in disadvantage and poverty, need to be context-based. This will aid the client in building social capital to help improve opportunity and choice, which will provide a pathway out of poverty.

### **What works with The Salvation Army (TSA) target groups:**

TSA provides a safe environment for our clients to build relationships over time. Developing a safe relationship within the TSA creates a compassionate place where clients can be supported to improve their self-confidence with literacy issues. Once the relationship has been established through engagement with TSA programs, then further learning opportunities for clients can be shaped.

Clients having established a trust and respect relationship with TSA are more likely to reveal their literacy, numeracy and digital shortfalls, noting that people with these sort of issues tend to be very good at hiding their deficiencies, therefore, TSA can provide a non-judgemental environment where people will not feel embarrassed or ridiculed about their literacy deficiencies.

Confidentiality aspects of our clients are paramount. Having a safe, respectful and trusting relationship with the TSA literacy program safeguards that privacy and confidentiality.

Research has indicated that Literacy skills programs offered by other agencies provide access for clients who have the confidence to approach them in the first place thus indicating a slightly higher academic learning level as being offered, however, TSA STeP123 Literacy project develops relationships with low literacy clients in order to improve their self-confidence in literacy skills, which in turn can lead to further learning at other external organisations offering slightly higher learning literacy level programs. This is a supporting conclusion of the UTAS Evaluation Final Report - June 2013 who state that *“A key learning from this [STeP123] project has been the link between literacy and developing the self-confidence to embark on other learning. There are early indications of the power of working on the confidence of the adult before embarking on more formal tuition”*

As previously indicated, adults with literacy deficiencies often are embarrassed about it and will go to great lengths to disguise their shortfalls. The TSA Literacy program is able to encourage our clients to decide for themselves to what level of improvement they are trying to achieve through individual support with filling in forms, reading to their children, driver licence tests and other such skills. Referrals and support to other organisations such as Libraries Tasmania who have ongoing literacy tutoring, or other organisations with further learning opportunities are part of the TSA literacy program referral service.

The STeP123 Literacy program is available across all TSA social programs to identify vulnerable people with literacy issues. TSA Social programs include Doorways Centres, Doorways to Parenting, Prison Programs, The Bridge, McCombe House. STeP123 also cooperates with neighbourhood houses and community groups across Tasmania, with new and established networks and partnerships across all service providers and not for profit organisations.

An outline of the STeP123 Literacy projects and resources:

## Projects for The School Years:

### Reading Together

The Salvation Army STeP123 Literacy program is currently implementing the *Reading Together* project in Dover District School, Cygnet and Huonville Primary schools. The project started in mid-2018 and was received so well that these schools anticipate an ongoing, continuing relationship well into the future.

TSA STeP123 Literacy, partners with schoolteachers to identify students aged 5-12 who need support with literacy skills. Approximately 70 students are currently using the weekly program, where they read and talk with a trained adult volunteer. TSA currently engages 17 volunteers to implement the program across the three schools.

The aim of the project is for students and volunteers to develop a trust and confidence relationship to help them enjoy reading. Further, it develops the students' enthusiasm for reading and conversation as many of the identified children don't have access to adults who speak or read with them at home. The research shows that conversation is crucial to improving reading literacy.

The second aim of the *Reading Together* project is to improve the adults' social connections to the local community for their health and wellbeing. The volunteers feel connected to the community and feel like they are making positive and important difference to the students' lives. Volunteer, Rob has offered that *"It feels good to help develop a skill base that you know can provide such enjoyment and information to these kids their whole life."*

Also offered by program volunteer, Peter who taught himself to read later in life, he doesn't want other children to go through what he experienced: *"For me, it's about helping kids be kind to themselves. The children become engaged in this nonjudgmental situation once the pressure of getting it right is being replaced with curiosity. This project enables the child to practise and talk about their reading with an adult who wants to listen."*

Teachers are seeing positive results:

- The project has improved engagement and the likelihood of students reading again; and
- Students' self-esteem and confidence in reading has risen dramatically.

End of 2021 feedback from teachers:

- *"I think the reading volunteer program is such a valuable one. It's reassuring to know that those students who we know don't read with parents at home are getting that weekly opportunity."*
- *"Anecdotally, a student's mum told me that she is so pleased that they are now wanting to read before bed and wants to keep reading even when she says it's time for sleep. They are also keen to borrow books from the library to read at home."*
- *"I think these students now have greater enjoyment of reading. Now that they have increased fluency and they're comprehending more, they are getting more out of their reading. I also think that their confidence with reading has increased."*
- *"I'd love to see all of these students continue the program next year"*

## Projects for The School Years and The Adult Years

### Card Buddies

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in 2020, STeP123 Literacy created 'Card Buddies' which continues today. It is an intergenerational project with Primary School children and aged care residents writing letters and cards to each other. This is a contextual way for students to help improve their literacy skills through reading and writing for a purpose.

As an alternative to physical visitor relations, young students writing to the residents helps create social connections with the outside community, particularly when they are feeling cut off from their own grandchildren and families.

*Card Buddies* started in 2020 and is continuing each year with a new batch of Primary School students and a small turnover of residents.

Ages of the students vary from 5 to 10 years. One card example is from a motivational student, age 10 who wrote: *"Shine bright like a Diamond. Dear Betty, your sweet, caring, nice and incredible. Never give up on anything. You are the one and only. Your amazing"*.

Feedback from residents is that the cards really make their day, especially when they've been out of touch with their families.

### Workshops for The Adult Years

Three workshops were developed including a comprehensive resource kit and facilitators manual. The groups are deliberately kept small which allows for a safe, non-threatening environment to encourage sharing and confidence building.

#### FiF-Filling in Forms

Concentrates on paper and digital forms which also helps improve general digital literacy skills.

It is a safe, fun, sharing and confidence building atmosphere for participants, with a key message that: **'It's never too late to learn'**.

- At 38, Jennifer felt ashamed of her low literacy. Then she found a way to escape her situation. *"When I came to The Salvation Army, I had missed many years of school. As a result, I had panic attacks trying to read and couldn't write simple sentences"*. Now Jennifer has regained some confidence to continue with simple literacy tutoring after participating in TSA workshops.

#### This is ME!

Helps improve emotional literacy skills such as empathy, relationship building and communication. The Aim is to inspire participants to continue on to further learning pathways. Participants created all forms of poetry which are then collated with their agreement to be read out loud in libraries around Tasmania.

- *“In the first few weeks I was embarrassed that my poems weren’t as good as others, but now I am more confident. Was worried about showing too much sadness, but now I accept that’s the way I write. Was looking at it differently – moved from sadness to love over the weeks.”*
- *“I shared when I felt unsure about sharing - made me feel good.”*

### **STeP up to IT**

Participants learn about computing software and how a computer works by producing a publication incorporating photos and artwork in either Microsoft Word, Publisher or Powerpoint.

- One participant is interested in further learning about Excel spreadsheets for her potential business venture.

Other responses were:

- *“My son tapped me on the shoulder and said, “Well done, Mum! And he’s installing Publisher on my computer tonight. He said he didn’t think I could handle it before.”*
- *“I can now talk to my son about computers – would never have done that before”*

### **Resources for The Early Years**

**Little STePS ABC and 123 playgroup literacy kits** – distribution to playcentres including Aboriginal child and family centres, including an instructional training manual for parents, educators and carers.

**Count With Me123 DVD and CD** – a set of counting songs for under 5’s, in collaboration with Communities for Children.

### **Resources for The Adult Years**

**STeP123 website** – creation and maintenance, reference material and referral source.

**Literacy Awareness and Assessment Tool** – training staff and volunteers. The use of a formal assessment tool (such as the ACSF tool) for use with TSA’s disadvantaged clients was seen as too formal and intimidating. The STeP123 Literacy Awareness and Assessment Tool is a more general, informal and client orientated literacy assessment tool. This tool is for case workers to use in their everyday work with clients.

**Conversation starter posters** - to prompt workers to start a literacy conversation with clients.

**UTAS evaluation of STeP123 project** - Adult literacy: ‘whole-of-service’ policy and practice directions, Final Report, June 2013.

**Improved awareness** - amongst TSA staff and volunteers about the importance of literacy as part of the client profile. Introduction of literacy data integrated into SAMIS reporting.

## **The Salvation Army – Communities for Children South East Tasmania**

Communities for Children deliver programs and activities for families with children in the 0-12 year age group. To improve the health and well-being of families and the development of young children, paying special attention to:

- Healthy young families — supporting parents to care for their children before and after birth and throughout the early years;
- Supporting families and parents — support for parents to provide children with secure attachment, consistent discipline and quality environments that are stable, positive, stimulating, safe and secure;
- Early learning — provide access to high quality early learning opportunities in the years before school; provide early identification and support for children at risk of developmental and behavioural problems; assist parents with ways they can stimulate and promote child development and learning from birth; and
- School transition and engagement - support children and families to make a smooth transition to school and work with local schools to assist children and families with their ongoing engagement with school.

Literacy resources and projects have been developed to help improve children and parent/carer literacy – family literacy. Communities for Children realises the importance of identifying literacy issues during early learning by providing support to families to help improve their own and their children’s literacy skills.

Many of the resources have a dual aim:

1. For parents/carers to encourage them to read and talk with their children, which may help with their own literacy improvement, if needed.
2. For the children to improve their literacy skills.

An outline of the Communities for Children literacy projects and resources:

### **Projects for The School Years and for The Adult Years**

**Community Cooking sessions** - incorporating literacy and numeracy skill development for fathers, families, multicultural communities and their children. This resulted in creating a series of recipe books (see below Resources for The School Years and for The Adult Years).

### **Resources for The Early Years and for The Adult Years**

**Born to Read** - booklet encouraging parents/carers to read to their children of 0-2 years.

**Look at a book** – resources to encourage parents/carers to read with their children - set of six posters and fridge magnets with images from Born to Read.

## Resources for The School Years and for The Adult Years

### Community recipe books -

*Fabulous Fathers cooking up a storm*

*Fabulous Families cooking up a storm*

*Fabulous Cultures cooking up a storm*

### Resources for The School Years

A series of books published by Communities for Children aimed at primary school children to help understand everyday issues and improve their reading and comprehension skills. The books are written for adults to read and discuss with children and to provide information about real life issues.

*My brother Sam – A story about bullying*

*Jake and Emily work it out – A story about making decisions*

*Tom and Jamal speak up – A story about cybersafety*

*Alicia helps Bec make a stand – A story about cyberbullying*

*Waiting for Dad – A story about supporting a friend*

*Tahlia and Jasmine plan a party – A story about staying safe and having fun*

*Cooper helps Jack make a plan – A story about supporting friends and family*