



The turnaround power of education

How education can change lives for the better



Research tells us that remaining at school offers young people their best chance of success in life. In this post, Cheryl Vardon, Former Principal Commissioner of the Family and Child Commission and Margaret Gurney, Assistant Director-General, State Schools Operations at the Department of Education share their thoughts on the power of education and how it can change lives for the better.

Between them, Margaret and Cheryl have been working with young people and their families for 40 years. That's a lot of time spent with young people, getting to know them and their families, and understanding what makes them tick.

As Margaret explains: "I started my career as a teacher and then later a principal, and eventually the Regional Director of the Far North Queensland education region. Now I lead a team supporting our state schools to deliver the best possible educational experience for our young people.

“As a leader in the Department of Education, I am committed to making sure every child, irrespective of their personal circumstances, can have the best possible chance to succeed in life.

MARGARET GURNEY, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR-GENERAL, STATE SCHOOL OPERATIONS

“In the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) ‘Equity and Quality in Education’ report, it talks about how the highest performing education systems across OECD countries are those that combine quality with equity.

“In these education systems, the vast majority of students have the opportunity to attain high-level skills regardless of their own personal and socio-economic circumstances.

“That’s the kind of system we are striving for here in Queensland – one that offers equal learning opportunities so we can make sure every child has a chance to fulfil their potential.”

The gift of education

Cheryl agrees. “In my earlier life as an educator, former Education Director-General, university administrator and in my previous role as Commissioner, I was privileged to hear the stories of many young people and to gain insights into how education has helped them overcome some really difficult challenges in their lives and find success, whatever that looks like for them.

“I know of some children who have never seen anyone in their family go to work. Yet, thanks to education, I’ve seen these same young people break the cycle of unemployment by staying at school and equipping themselves with the knowledge and skills they need to go on to further study or training or to find a job.

“We know that young people who leave school early in Years 10, 11 or 12 do not have the same chance of success as those who complete Year 12, with one in three early school leavers not in study or work in the year after leaving school.

“And we also know that the social and economic cost of young people disengaging from their education is just

too great. So supporting young people to stay at school is essential both because it recognises their intrinsic right to access a high-quality education and also because it promotes social cohesion.

“Education is a human right and a gift that everyone can benefit from if they are given the chance. And I have an unshakeable belief that every student can succeed in their education if they have enough adults in their lives willing to support them.”

CHERYL VARDON, FORMER PRINCIPAL COMMISSIONER OF THE FAMILY AND CHILD COMMISSION

Trusted adults

For Margaret and Cheryl, the role of parents and other trusted adults in promoting a love of learning and helping children to overcome challenges at school, cannot be overstated.

“For some kids, trusted adults are their parents or someone in their family; for other kids it might be that one special teacher at school who sees something in them,” explains Margaret.

“No matter how tough things get, knowing a trusted adult believes in you can be the difference between a young person staying at school or opting out.”

Igniting a spark

Both Margaret and Cheryl agree that one way to help kids appreciate the value of education in their lives is to encourage them do the things they love and feel passionate about.

“When a parent or another trusted adult helps a child find their spark – that thing that gives a person their energy and joy – and encourages them to pursue it, it can make such a positive difference in a child’s life

<https://www.sparktheirfuture.qld.edu.au/the-turnaround-power-of-education>

while also helping them in their learning at school,” explains Margaret.

“The steps a child takes to get to the next level in whatever sparks their interest are the same steps they can apply to succeeding at anything in life, including their education.

“That sense of accomplishment they feel when they are pursuing their spark can lead to the kind of positive mindset that can help get them through the gates to school or open the text book they’ve been avoiding.

“If we want kids to get the most out of their education, we need the adults in their lives to support them and help them stick with it.” This is where our schools play their part.

Connection and listening

Cheryl strongly believes that listening is an important skill for parents who want to try and better connect with their children and give them the support they need to succeed at school.

“The findings from our ‘Growing up in Queensland’ survey, where every two years we invite children across the state to tell us about what it’s like to grow up in Queensland, what’s important to them, and what their hopes and dreams are, tell us that what kids want is for adults to listen to them.

“They want real conversations and connections with the adults in their lives, especially their parents. And on top of that, they want to be able to do the things they love and feel passionate about.

“A parent or a trusted adult can have the most profound impact on a child’s life, helping them to find their spark and realise their potential through learning.

“Sometimes it can help to just be there and listen rather than trying to solve a problem a child might share with you. Other times, even just telling a young person your own story and explaining how education has helped you in your life can plant an important seed for their future.”

Whatever it takes

As policy-makers and advocates for children, both Margaret and Cheryl see it as their job to make sure the needs of children and young people are recognised and met.

“For me, it’s about doing whatever it takes to make sure every child, especially the ones who are struggling the most, gets the best opportunities for a great education,” says Margaret.

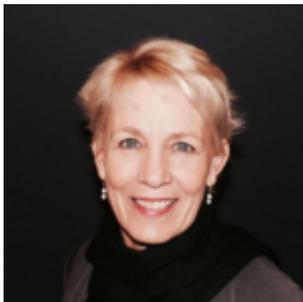
Refocusing on our moral purpose and building a whole of community commitment to the futures of our children and young people is where we need to start.

“I agree,” says Cheryl. “It does require us to do whatever it takes so every young person can experience a sense of joy in their lives partnered with the resilience they will need to overcome life’s challenges.

“If we can all work together – parents, carers, teachers, school leaders, policy-makers and advocates – so every child knows we are here for them today and will be looking out for them tomorrow, then I am confident every young person can experience the transformational power of education and find success in their lives.”

Find out more

Talking Families and Spark their Future are here to support you through the tough years of parenting.



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