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Compounding effects of COVID and economic crisis are widening education gap for Australia's most vulnerable students

The Big Giveback returns to raise vital funds for young Australians experiencing disadvantage through The Smith Family's education support programs

The Smith Family is deeply concerned that the compounding effects of COVID's long tail and the escalating economic crisis is pushing Australia's most vulnerable children further behind in their education.

"The families that we support have faced one hit after another in recent years, and this is causing significant flow-on effects to children's education," said The Smith Family CEO Doug Taylor. "Young people experiencing disadvantage need our support now more than ever before, so they don't fall even further behind in their education and disengage all together."

Operating in more than 760 schools across the country, the national education charity said some of the key challenges reported by families and their schools in June include:

- The pandemic and economic pressures have been **exacerbating pre-existing education gaps** for students in need, creating challenges with engagement, performance and attendance
- Families are **struggling to afford basic necessities**, such as housing, electricity to stay warm, petrol and food, making it even **harder to meet education costs** for their child/ren
- **Surging rent and housing costs** mean families have been faced with moving homes and schools, causing widespread instability and disruption to their child/ren's learning

These challenges highlight the importance of **The Big Giveback** campaign, which has launched across Australia today for 2023. It aims to raise money for The Smith Family's vital learning and mentoring programs to support young Australians who have been struggling to catch up in their education.

During the month of August, 10 cents from the sale of non-alcoholic drinks made by Asahi Lifestyle Beverages (formerly Schweppes Australia) will be donated to The Smith Family, with 5,000 outlets including convenience stores, service stations and major chains across Australia participating, including Euro Garages, Lord of the Fries and Wendy's.

"While schools are working hard to keep children engaged in the classroom and ensuring education gaps don't continue to widen, providing additional support beyond the school gate has never been more critical," said Mr Taylor.

“The Smith Family is committed to increasing the number of students participating in our flagship *Learning for Life* program, which provides access to extra reading, career pathways, and mentoring support to help students catch up at school and improve their overall educational and life outcomes.”

The latest data on Smith Family program outcomes found that children are thriving after taking part in the charity’s out-of-school programs, with:

- **94% of students improving their reading** through the *student2student* peer reading program
- More than **three quarters of students** reporting that out-of-school Learning Clubs helped them to **perform better in class and at school**
- And **83% of students stated they feel more confident** about their future career goals after participating in the Smith Family’s ‘Arts Education’ program *SmArts*

“Our education programs not only increase students’ skills, confidence and motivation to be able to fully engage in their learning, but we also know that students who can stay at school and complete Year 12 go on to have much better opportunities into the future,” said Mr Taylor.

Asahi Lifestyles Beverages CEO Nigel Parsons said: “The Big Giveback sees small change make a big change. This is the fourth year of the campaign and this time we aim to raise \$400,000 for Australian students who need extra support to ensure they don’t fall behind. As our flagship charity partner, we are proud to be supporting The Smith Family again with this nationwide initiative.”

Australians can get behind ***The Big Giveback*** at participating stores or by making a donation online at **thebiggiveback.com.au**

“We all want children to succeed at school and together, with the support of the generous community and our valued partners at Asahi Lifestyle Beverages, we can ensure that young people in need have access to essential learning support to help them to thrive in their education and create brighter futures for themselves,” said Mr Taylor.

EDITOR’S NOTES

The Smith Family is a children’s education charity that helps young Australians experiencing disadvantage to create better futures for themselves through harnessing the power of education. It works with more than 760 Australian schools to support 60,000 students experiencing disadvantage through its Learning for Life education support program. For more, visit thesmithfamily.com.au

The Big Giveback is an Asahi Lifestyle Beverages initiative. Participating brands include Schweppes, Cool Ridge water, Solo, Pepsi Max, Gatorade and Lipton Iced Tea. For more information on participating products and retailers, visit thebiggiveback.com.au

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