



## Submission to the Child Protection Inquiry 2013

With over eight hundred volunteers visiting nearly one thousand Queensland children in foster care each week, The Pyjama Foundation is uniquely placed to ascertain and respond to the needs of children in care in Queensland.

Being in foster care is, in itself, a traumatic experience and, when coupled with pre-existing trauma experienced earlier in a child's existence, can lead to a life persistently affected by low educational outcomes, emotional instability and an inability to relate to others. (*Effects of traumatic events on children*; Bruce D. Perry MD, Ph.D)

The Pyjama Foundation, through its learning-based mentoring program and other activities, is helping to address this issue for children in care.

It is a sad fact that there are a significant number of children in the foster care system in Queensland at any given time, and that this number grows significantly each year. It is also a sad fact that the limited number of carers means that often there are many children in an extremely busy household. Children in care frequently have to move a number of times between foster homes and also in and out of care. This would be traumatic for any child, but is especially so for children who have already experienced trauma to the extent of being removed from their family for their own safety. An additional problem is that this industry experiences high staff turnover, so the children's contacts within the Department can also change frequently.

The result? Children in care are shuffled around, between homes, carers, families, and case workers. This is a highly complex problem which continues to affect the children's ability to form positive relationships. It also means that long-term life skills such as learning to read and to do basic maths are affected.

In January 2011, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare released a report, *Educational outcomes of children under guardianship or custody orders: a pilot study, Stage 2* which states that Children on guardianship/custody orders across the five participating states had consistently lower levels of achievement than all children. Findings include:

- 92.1% of all children in Queensland achieved minimum standards for numeracy in Grade 3 compared with 65.7% of children in care.
- 79.8% of all Grade 7 children in 2006 achieved minimum numeracy standards compared with 42.8% of children in care.

It is crucial for the children's development and life outcomes that they are encouraged to develop a love of learning, that they learn basic literacy and numeracy skills that will assist them in their schooling and for life, and that they experience trusting relationships with positive role models who are a consistent presence in their lives.

Because schools are often places of stress to foster children who underachieve academically it is vital that any plan to promote their educational and emotional growth take place in a safe environment which does not trigger protective behaviours which limit their ability to interact and learn.

The Pyjama Foundation offers a learning-based mentoring program free-of-charge for children in foster care. This program provides an opportunity for members of the wider community to engage one-on-one with a child in care. It helps the children to develop learning skills, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy; builds their confidence; and, crucially, helps them to learn that adults can be trusted. The Love of Learning

### **A Foster Carer who has four Pyjama Angels visiting his home each week:**

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude and thanks to the Angels from The Pyjama Foundation. Someone once told me I was wasting my time with these children! My response...if you plant a seed in someone's mind and water it with kindness and love while giving them the tools they need, they blossom into beautiful people!

The work the Pyjama Angels do is instrumental in helping my children achieve this personal goal. Reading is just one of the tools these children need and having someone to guide and encourage them in this area provides a stepping stone towards bigger and better things.

Schools and parents/carers alike, have such a huge task in the area of teaching. Whether it be basics like reading, writing and arithmetic or cooking, personal behaviour and self respect. The Pyjama Angels fill a void of reinforcing the basic necessity that is reading thus enhancing children's progress in all other areas. This is truly a commendable role.

Personally, my kids love their visits from the Angels, who they consider part of the family! Hide and seek is a favourite game used to welcome the Angels to our home. The children know when the Pyjama Angels are coming and wait to see them arrive, then immediately hide in their previously chosen hiding spots waiting to be found! What a wonderful beginning to an activity that many children see as a chore. The enjoyment these angels bring to the children's reading sessions has no doubt helped the children gain so much more from this experience.

Again, thank you to all the Angels from the Pyjama Foundation. I truly applaud you for all that you do with so many children.

Program's strong educational focus aims to improve the children's life opportunities.

However, the outcomes are significantly greater; for the children and the community.

More than 2700 children and volunteers have been involved in the program since 2004. At present, nearly 1000 Queensland children in care are visited each week by more than 800 volunteer Pyjama Angels. By providing this service within the children's foster homes, the foundation is avoiding any negative impacts that the children may feel at being pulled from their normal classroom for additional learning support. The foundation also visits with children in the pre-school years, with a three-month old being the youngest child to be matched with a Pyjama Angel so far. The earlier the foundation is able to start working with the children, the greater impact the program will have.

Importantly, when children change foster homes their Pyjama Angel can usually stay with them. When children who were previously in care return to their biological families and it doesn't work out, often when they are returned to care they can be re-matched with the same Pyjama Angel. Pyjama Angels can be a constant presence in the child's life when all else around them changes. Sometimes, they are the only constant, positive relationship a child has with an adult.

The foundation has a unique opportunity to engage with the children in a way that supports them now and provides a basis for a more positive life experience.

Research by Social Ventures Australia Consulting (2011) found that the children were building – often for the first time – a positive, trusting relationship with an adult. The children realise that the Pyjama Angels visit them because they want to, not because it is their job. This positive relationship flows over to other relationships in the children's lives, as the children improve their relationships in their home and at school.

Long-term, this program is motivating the children to complete schooling; helping to provide access to the same educational, health and life opportunities as other children; improving employment prospects; reducing the potential for homelessness; increasing social capital and supportive communities; and more.

#### **Foster Carer:**

Pyjama Angels are very special people. They don't come to criticise or 'inspect' the children or me. They don't try to 'fix' my children by disciplining them; rather they accept the children in my care as they are and try to help them by making a connection with them.

A Pyjama Angel makes a child feel special. They bring fun and laughter into a child's life without stress or hidden agenda. They communicate with a child and make them feel safe.

I have no hesitation in recommending this scheme to other carers. All children should have an Angel.

#### **Foster Carer:**

'I think this program is ...fantastic...the volunteers who come are well loved. It is fantastic social contact for the children to be able to relate to people outside the home. Once you become a foster carer you lose contact with many of your friends so the kids don't get to socialize'

**Pyjama Angel:**

Knowing that my child trusts me and enjoys my visits, and seeing the caring foster family environment where she has lived, gives me a great sense of satisfaction and a feeling that hopefully I have been able to contribute something to this child's life.

**Pyjama Angel:**

I think this is a wonderful program and I love being part of it. Being a Pyjama Angel is so rewarding and allows me to leave a legacy in a life of a child. Children are precious and need to know that they are unique, special and deserving of our time and effort. Building a healthy self esteem is so important, especially for children in foster care. This program is an important part of the process.

**Pyjama Angel:**

Volunteering to work with children seemed a way to put some balance into my life, but I never imagined how much pleasure I would derive from reading and spending just an hour each week with a foster child.

The program is highly effective, with independent research showing that “90% of carers who foster children in the program have seen the child’s literacy skills improve.”

Since 2005 the foundation has focused on improving the literacy skills of children in care. At present, the Shell Numeracy Module is being added to the program, allowing the foundation’s volunteers to engage the children in activities that will assist their skills in this area also.

Research<sup>i</sup> identified a number of outcomes for children and foster carers. Children in the program increased their trust in people, increased enjoyment of reading and learning, and increased their engagement at school. Foster carers’ increased their well-being due to improvement in how they read and play with the children, and increased their quality time with the children.

By improving the children’s literacy and numeracy skills, and providing positive, educated role models, this program increases the children’s engagement in their own education, develops a love of books and reading, and improves basic literacy and numeracy skills. This will increase the children’s long-term life outcomes, their employability, and make a positive, life-long impact.

### Letter from a Foster Carer:

I am writing to let you know how invaluable I have found the program and services offered by the Pyjama Foundation. I have had Angels coming to read to the children in my care for 3 years and continue to be impressed with the quality and the generosity of the Foundation and its volunteers.

I normally have between 5 and 7 children in my care and have 4 Angels visiting my house each week to read to the younger children. Each child adores their reader and the adults have spent considerable time and displayed a high level of skill building a relationship with each of their children. I cannot over state the importance of this relationship for a child in care. Not only does the visit provide an enthusiastically anticipated focal point to the week but the one-on-one times bolsters the self-esteem of each of these children as it reinforces to them that they are special and adults do care for them. At least once each day I get asked by the younger children, "is my reader coming today?" I don't know how the staff at the Foundation do it, but the match between the child and the reader has been perfect and I believe this is one of the most important aspects to the program's success.

The hour reading to and with the children each week has noticeably contributed to their self-confidence and academic skill level. My 5-year-old's enthusiasm for learning her letters has improved dramatically since her reader started working with her. Now every "S" is pointed out to me and I am told that "S" is Sam's letter – the name of her reader! My 12-year-old (who is many years behind in her schooling, thanks to numerous school changes) is developing more confidence in her grammar and spelling skills. My 7-year-old who has learning delays and poor self-image delights in cuddling up to her reader each week and being made to feel special. And finally my precocious 4-year-old loves the stimulation of the games and new books her reader provides her with each week!!!

The volunteer readers demonstrate their generosity and kindness each week. I know they frequently make sacrifices in their own lives to keep their appointment with my children and I appreciate this greatly. The Angels also show flexibility that is a great asset when working with foster families. Often, if I have an extra child for a week or two, one or more of the Angels will happily incorporate them into their hour's reading. The Pyjama Foundation's resources appear to be extensive and the readers who come to my home have obviously spent considerable time and effort in selecting ones especially suited to the child they read to.

I think this is a wonderful program that you offer children in care and I have seen how the children in my care have benefited from all the Pyjama Foundation has offered them. I cannot think of anyway you could improve this service, so I would have to rate it 10/10!

In 2006 an independent assessment commissioned by the Queensland Government<sup>6</sup> stated:

*It was evident throughout the evaluation process that the Foundation promotes its work using a positive approach that values the children and encourages/inspires the ordinary citizen to feel extraordinary through the contribution they can make. Every volunteer the evaluator either spoke with or received a survey from identified that 'making a difference' in the lives of these children was a key motivator of their work and continuation of work through the Foundation.*

### Case Study 1: “Bob”

Ralph is a Pyjama Angel who visits Bob, who is in residential care. He says that Bob has anger issues. If he is given a computer he will break it. He says the residential carers are doing their job as the house is clean and there is plenty of nutritious food however the carers can't make him eat it so he eats a lot of junk food. Over Ralph's time visiting with Bob he has observed at least 12 different case workers and perhaps as many as 20.

A while ago Ralph wanted to call it quits because Bob's reading didn't seem to be improving. The case worker spent about an hour talking with him and said that Ralph comes 3 hours per week and that in the past 6 months he was the only consistent person in Bob's life. They asked Ralph to reconsider finishing up, which he has done. He says Bob doesn't like reading but would much rather do hands-on types of construction. Ralph found a science kit his wife had bought but not used. He has taken it out about 8-10 times so far and they have made something different every time. He worries about Bob because he thinks he could easily do a trade or maybe become an engineer but he has not had the opportunity or upbringing to recognise the importance of education.

### Case Study 2: “Joanne”

Penni was matched with Joanne in March 2006, when Joanne was 3 years old. In the period to June 2011, Joanne's primary Carer changed five times, as she moved back and forth between her Grandmother and mother, and then to her Aunt. Joanne lived in at least 11 different homes, with many movements occurring during periods she was in the care of her mother. The instability and negative influences in her life led to actions such as roaming the streets at night time and allegedly stealing from neighbours' letterboxes. The number of Case Workers Joanne had over this period was not tracked by the foundation.

Over this five year period, Penni was the most constant positive role model in Joanne's life. Due to her unique perspective as Joanne's Pyjama Angel, Penni was able to provide significant background information to Joanne's new Case Worker when her situation was being assessed.

The foundation also commissioned Zark Consultancy<sup>ii</sup> to evaluate the Love of Learning Program, with very positive results. The report states:

*The evaluation found that the impacts of the program include providing children in care with caring and supportive mentors who are spending valuable time with them, helping the children to become more confident and interested in reading and learning. These results indicate that the Love of Learning Program is an effective strategy that is achieving its objectives.*



All reports are available to interested parties, with summaries of the reports by Social Ventures Australia Consultancy and Zark Consultancy provided as attachments.

Two case studies are provided as examples of the positive relationships between a child in care and their volunteer mentor (Pyjama Angel). Every foster child needs positive role models, and The Pyjama Foundation's program is proven to facilitate mentoring in a highly effective manner.

In these and many other cases, volunteer Pyjama Angels are the most consistent, positive relationship in the child's life. Volunteers are currently matched with nearly 1000 Queensland foster children, so there is a long way to go. Therefore the foundation is well-positioned to provide positive life-experience for children in care, support for foster carers, and to engage the children in activities with positive role models which can change the direction of their lives.

## In conclusion

The Pyjama Foundation is uniquely placed to support the educational needs of children in foster care. Its program helps to develop the children's engagement in their own learning, builds their skills for schooling and for life, and widens their community networks through establishing positive, trusted relationships with adult mentors.

---

<sup>i</sup> Social Ventures Australia (SVA) Consulting. 2011. *The Pyjama Foundation Baseline Social Return on Investment Report*. Research available on request (summary available at [www.thepyjamafoundation.com](http://www.thepyjamafoundation.com)).

<sup>ii</sup> Knight, Ruth. 2011. *The Pyjama Foundation Love of Learning® Program Evaluation Report*. Zark Consultancy. Research available on request (summary available at [www.thepyjamafoundation.com](http://www.thepyjamafoundation.com)).



## Baseline Social Return on Investment (SROI) Analysis

### About The Pyjama Foundation®

The Pyjama Foundation was established in September 2004 to transform the futures of children in care, by making a practical, positive difference to their lives.

#### The Pyjama Foundation's Mission

To improve the literacy and educational outcomes of children living care

Research reviewed by The Pyjama Foundation's Founder, Bronwyn Sheehan, found that literacy skills – crucially important for life in our society – were lacking amongst foster children, and that any improvement made in literacy skills creates a lifelong positive impact. It also found numeracy skill levels to be very poor.

The Pyjama Foundation operates throughout Queensland, in Brisbane (head office), Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Ipswich, Toowoomba, Wide Bay, Townsville, Mackay and Cairns.

After having experienced sustained growth in Queensland since 2004, The Pyjama Foundation commenced operations in Sydney, New South Wales in 2011.

### About the Love of Learning Program®

Since 2005, the foundation has been alleviating some of the pressure on foster carers in a practical way - through the volunteer-implemented, learning-based The Pyjama Foundation Love of Learning Program®. Trained mentors are matched with a child who they visit each week, to spend one-on-one time focussing specifically on improving the children's literacy skills.

The foundation is currently developing a numeracy module to add to the program.

Through word-of-mouth and local press coverage, the rate of volunteer recruitment has increased considerably since that first training session. To date, over 1700 volunteers have been recruited, and more than 1700 children have been referred to the program.

The long term aims of the Love of Learning Program for the children include that they will be motivated and supported to finish school; that they will have equitable access to educational, health and life opportunities; that they will have career goals and pathways; and that they will not become homeless. The Pyjama Foundation is breaking the cycle of disadvantage frequently experienced by these at-risk children.

### What is SROI?

Social Return on Investment (SROI) is an internationally recognised methodology that measures the value created for stakeholders. SROI is a framework for identifying, measuring and accounting for the value an activity creates from the perspective of each stakeholder.



### Measuring our Impact

In order to assess the value that was created by the Love of Learning program, The Pyjama Foundation worked with Social Ventures Australia (SVA) Consulting, a leading SROI practitioner in Australia.

The primary objective of this SROI analysis was to understand and value the impact the Love of Learning Program has had on the various stakeholders benefitting from its activities.

The analysis is a baseline SROI analysis which uses the 2011 financial year investment into the Love of Learning Program®.

### Fast Facts

#### Social Return on Investment:

- For every \$1 of cash or time invested in The Pyjama Foundation program, **\$1.73** is created in value
  - Investment:* \$1,719,000 (incl. valuation of in kind support by Pyjama Angels)
  - Value created:* \$2,977,000
- For every \$1 of cash invested in The Pyjama Foundation program, **\$4.86** is created in value
  - Investment:* \$612,414
  - Value created:* \$2,977,000

## Stakeholder Outcomes

The SROI analysis first identifies the major stakeholders who will experience change from their engagement with the Love of Learning program and then aims to understand what these changes are, i.e. the outcomes, for each group. The outcomes for each major stakeholder group include:

- **Children in foster care**, who have increased their trust in people, their enjoyment of reading and learning, and subsequently have been more engaged at school.

"I feel extra happy in my heart when she comes. She is always kind to me and we are always happy. I always have lots of fun reading. I like reading a lot!"

Program Participant (Aged 7 Years), 2011

- **Foster carers**, who increased their own well-being due to improvements in how they read and play with their children. They also increased the amount of quality time they spent with their other children.
- **Queensland Government**, who experience a reduction in the amount of time spent by Child Safety Officers providing additional support to children.
- **Pyjama Angels**, who volunteered their time to read and play with children in foster care and were able to influence the positive changes experienced by these children.

"I helped to give the family advice on what books they should have in the household."

Pyjama Angel, April 2011

- **Funders**, who benefit from seeing positive changes to children in foster care due to the activities of The Pyjama Foundation.



## Highlights

- 80% of value is created for children in foster care. The main driver of value creation is that foster children are able to develop trust in people, first their Pyjama Angel and then their foster parent. This is a significant change for these young people as they have not had many positive role models that have led to trusted relationships before.
- The Pyjama Angels' time is a critical contribution to the Love of Learning Program, as 64% of the valuation of all inputs (cash and time) is from the Pyjama Angels. This demonstrates the critical importance of the Pyjama Angels' input into the analysis.
- The SROI ratio for the cash investment in The Pyjama Foundation is 4.86:1. This demonstrates to cash investors in The Pyjama Foundation that significant value is created from their investment.

## Considerations

- It is important to note that the SROI ratios should not be compared between organisations without having a clear understanding of both organisations' strategies, programs logic or theories of change, geographic locations, stages of development and what the organisations are looking to achieve. A judgement about whether a return is good or bad can only be made when using comparable data.
- The Pyjama Foundation is using pre-testing tools such as the Early Literacy Skills Assessment and the Burt Word Reading Test to measure improvements in literacy rates amongst foster children. Results of these assessments were not available prior to the period of analysis (FY11).
- The valuation of time was a major variable in the SROI analysis. This related to both inputs and outcomes. A conservative approach to this method of valuation was applied throughout the analysis thereby ensuring there was no over-claiming.

## Contact details

For the full report, please contact:

**The Pyjama Foundation**

T: (07) 3262 5569

E: [tanya@thepyjamafoundation.com](mailto:tanya@thepyjamafoundation.com)

W: <http://www.thepyjamafoundation.com>

A: Level 1, 7 Hudson Rd (Cnr Bimbil St), Albion Qld 4010



## The Pyjama Foundation

### Love of Learning Program Evaluation

#### Interim Report Summary

The Pyjama Foundation evaluation began in late 2010 with the aim of collecting empirical evidence about how successfully the Love of Learning Program provides a forum in which volunteer adult mentors develop supportive relationships with children in foster care, helping them to improve their literacy skills and educational outcomes.

International research has already established that youth mentoring programs are an effective means of providing youth at-risk with the adult assistance and positive role models they require. However, The Pyjama Foundation is keen to establish more specifically if the innovative Love of Learning Program should be used as a primary intervention strategy to address the poor literacy and educational achievements frequently experienced by children living in out of home care.

The final report, which will be released in late 2011, will assist The Pyjama Foundation to determine the specific outcomes and benefits of the program and ensure that they are using their resources in the most efficient and appropriate manner.

The evaluation is collecting evidence to assess:

- 1 The outcomes of the Love of Learning Program.
- 2 If the program is providing warm and positive mentoring relationships for children in foster care.

The evaluation is using a mixed methods approach utilising both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. To ensure the reliability of the findings, information is being obtained from the volunteer mentors, foster carers and children in the program.

#### Findings to Date

A random sample of 121 mentors who volunteer with The Pyjama Foundation have been surveyed. An analysis of the results shows that the volunteers have good role clarity; they feel confident when they mentor and they are satisfied with the support

they are given from The Pyjama Foundation. 96% of mentors stated that they have a warm and positive relationship with the child they mentor. This indicates that the children in the program are benefiting from having a caring and supportive adult in their life who is interested in them, their development and achievements.

A random sample of 72 carers who foster children in the Love of Learning Program have been surveyed. The results reveal that 97% of carers believe their foster child has a warm and positive relationship with their Pyjama Angel. 90% of the carers have seen improvements in their child's reading, comprehension, speech, positive attitude and confidence. In particular, the carers report that they had seen the biggest improvement in the child's confidence.

Children in the program are currently being surveyed and preliminary findings suggest that the children are very satisfied with the Love of Learning Program, they are enjoying the educational activities provided by their mentor and this is encouraging them to learn and read more.

#### Conclusion

The evaluation is demonstrating that the Love of Learning Program is an effective intervention helping to increase children's literacy skills and educational outcomes. The results suggest that children in the Love of Learning Program are being provided with a warm and positive role model and mentor. The Pyjama Angels are helping the children get pleasure, information, and ideas from reading and playing, which is having a positive effect on the children's attitudes toward learning and themselves.

As our knowledge about the program grows, so does our enthusiasm to ensure that it continues to make a positive and lasting impact on children living in foster care.



## **The Pyjama Foundation**

### **Love of Learning Program Evaluation**

**Christine works full time and is an Angel in her own time; she is amazing with our family; calm, gentle and encouraging to our foster daughter.**

Foster Carer

**I congratulate the Foundation for this wonderful programme. I have been a carer for 15 years and have seen the huge difference the Angels have made to my little ones who have been fortunate enough to have their own 'special person'. Compared to my children pre foundation the difference is incredible. The Angels contribute to my children's confidence and self worth. The children love the fact that their Angel is their Angel only. And that makes them feel very special. Plus they are learning while they have fun. When you have 9 children in care as we do, you really appreciate the one on one attention these people give to the kids. Thank you all so very much!**

Foster Carer

**I cannot thank Pyjama Foundation enough for the support they offer my foster child. Monday nights are not the same without our Angel!**

Foster Carer

**I enjoy reading to the children. The environment is busy and noisy, lots of kids and activities but I feel the experience is positive for myself and the children.**

Pyjama Angel

**It's a great program with far reaching benefits for these children. Love and reassurance being the main ingredient. My boy says, "Will you be my reader for ever and ever until I grow up and get married?"**

Pyjama Angel

**Its fun, I learn stuff. I love it when we do a variety of stuff especially craft.**

Program Participant (Aged 9 Years)

**I feel extra happy in my heart when she comes. She is always kind to me and we are always happy. I always have lots of fun reading. I like reading a lot!**

Program Participant (Aged 7 Years)

**It is good that it has helped me with homework and spelling and punctuation and maths which has been really good.**

Program Participant (Aged 9 Years)

**My Angel reads two pages and I read the next two pages - this is a good way of reading I think.**

Program Participant (Aged 9 Years)

The Pyjama Foundation Love of Learning Program™, is a literacy-based mentoring program creating positive, life-long change for children in care. The Pyjama Foundation recruits, screens, trains and supports volunteer Pyjama Angels who visit a child in foster care or kinship care once a week for at least an hour, to read books aloud, play educational games and help them with their homework.