



Lighting the way, together.

Little Stars Learners Program
Social Return on Investment

19 August 2024

 Lumenia

Acknowledgement of Country

Lumenia respectfully acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first peoples of Australia, and the Traditional Owners of the land, recognising that sovereignty was never ceded.

We acknowledge the wisdom and strength of their Elders, and the enduring role that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders play in empowering families and communities across the sector.

We pay our respect to Elders, knowledge holders and leaders of the past, present and future.



'Community Connections'

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Barkindtji, Yorta Yorta and Dhudaroah
Commissioned by Lumenia, 2024



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Summary

Little Stars Learners creates positive learners who engage in education and thrive

Little Stars Learners is an educational support program for children living in out-of-home care (OOHC). The program addresses the unique challenges faced by children who have experienced complex childhood trauma, providing personalised, trauma-informed support to improve their educational outcomes.

Social Return on Investment analysis

Children in OOHC often struggle with developmental, social, and emotional challenges that impact their ability to learn and engage in school. Little Stars Learners aims to break the cycle of disadvantage by offering early intervention and tailored support.

The program focuses on providing flexible and tailored supports to children and young people, it also supports teachers, carers, and the community as young people improve their confidence and view of themselves as learners.

In mid 2024 Little Stars Learners commissioned Lumenia to undertake a Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis on the program. This summary report describes the methodology, program logic and resulting analysis of program impact arising from this work.

Snapshot 2024

- 173 children and young people are currently participating in Little Stars in 2024, average age 11 (Grade 6)
- 50% are female, 49% male, 1% non-binary
- 81% of current students in 2024 were enrolled in Little Stars in previous years
- 87% of students are in Foster care, 16% in residential care and 2% in a Guardianship placement
- 40 Education Mentors will deliver 12,456 hours of education mentoring over 36 weeks

Social and economic value creation



Key outcomes

- Children were motivated and empowered to engage in education and learning
- Children experienced improved confidence, mental health and wellbeing
- Carers and children experienced a more harmonious household and reduced risk of placement breakdown
- Carers experienced improved mental health and wellbeing
- Education mentors received practical experience in working with children
- There was an improvement in pro-social behaviors by children



Little Stars Learning

About Little Stars

Established in 2020, Little Stars Learners is an educational support program for children living in out-of-home care (OOHC). The program addresses the unique challenges faced by children who have experienced complex childhood trauma, providing personalised, trauma-informed support to improve their educational outcomes.

Children in OOHC often struggle with developmental, social, and emotional challenges that impact their ability to learn and engage in school. Little Stars Learners aims to break the cycle of disadvantage by offering early intervention and tailored support.

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“*Katie* was very behind in school initially. At school awards recently they told us they cheered the loudest when she got not 1, but 3 awards! - and said the proudest thing of all for them was her beaming smile. It's all about the confidence it creates for kids to see themselves as learners and build their self-worth*”

Caseworker

*name changed for privacy

What sets Little Stars Learners apart - what stakeholders tell us.....

Trauma-informed approach: Education Mentors who are trained in trauma-informed practices

Personalised and flexible support: Tailored to each child's specific circumstances and learning needs

High-quality, well trained and committed Education Mentors: Carefully matched with children and young people based on interests and needs

Relationship-focused approach: building stable, long-term connections including with Mentors

Holistic development: Addresses academic needs, social skills, and emotional well-being, contributes to a harmonious home environment

Professionalism and expertise: Regular progress reports and communication with carers and case workers. Education Mentors offer higher level of professionalism than volunteer programs of a similar nature, with trauma understanding

Academic engagement: enables children to engage with school and see themselves as lifelong learners

Accessibility: Scholarship component makes the program available minimal administrative burden

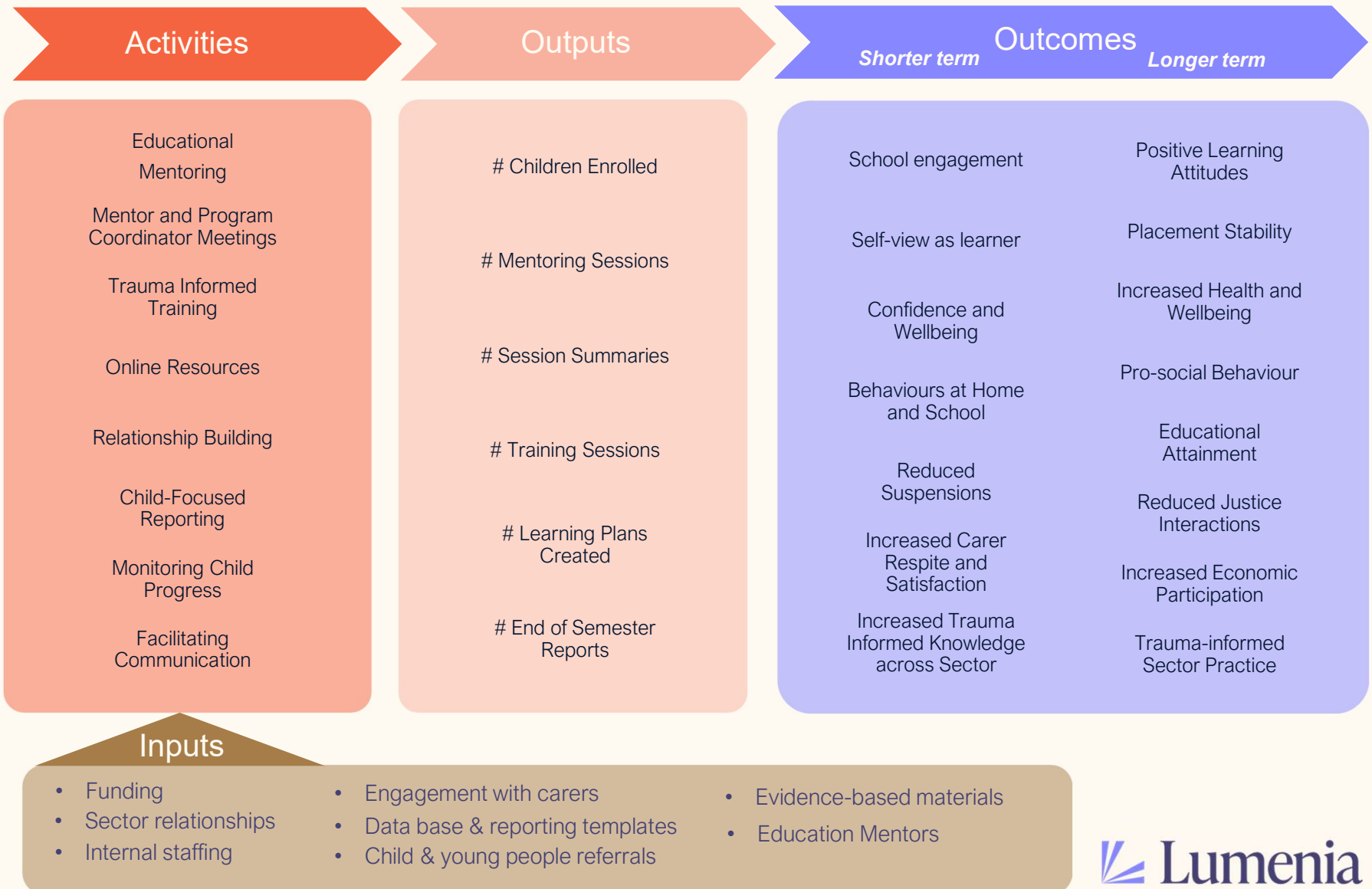
Positive impact beyond education: Improves children's confidence and self-esteem, and ability to form relationships

Long-term impacts: Expands children's view of their future possibilities and changes the trajectory of children's lives



Little Stars Program Logic

The Program Logic represents how Little Stars Learners seeks to achieve its objective to meet the challenges that children living in out-of-home care face, in order to close the gap between children in out-of-home care and their peers and give children in out-of-home care an equal opportunity to succeed, and to deliver a positive impact

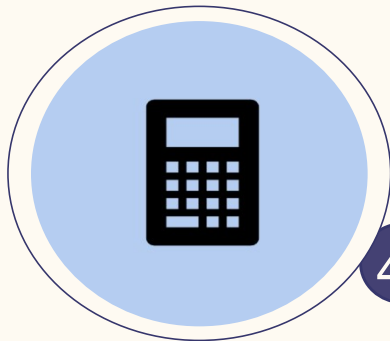


SROI Method

The analysis of social return on investment of Little Stars Learners was undertaken via a systematic and comprehensive best practice approach. This included:

4. Calculating the SROI

SROI calculated through the value of tangible and intangible benefits divided by the value of the investment, presented alongside a holistic narrative on the impact of the initiatives guided by the views of participants and stakeholders



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1. Mapping Outcomes

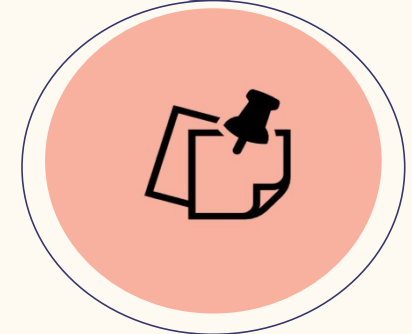
Co-development of a Program Logic, identifying and categorising the various changes or effects that result from the investments, including short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes across social & economic dimensions, being led by key stakeholder perspectives



1

2. Evidencing & Valuing Outcomes

Elevating child and family voices and collecting data and evidence via survey, administrative data and research and assigning a monetary value



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3. Establishing Impact

Synthesising evidence to determine the overall effect of Little Stars and the positive changes, benefits, and value generated

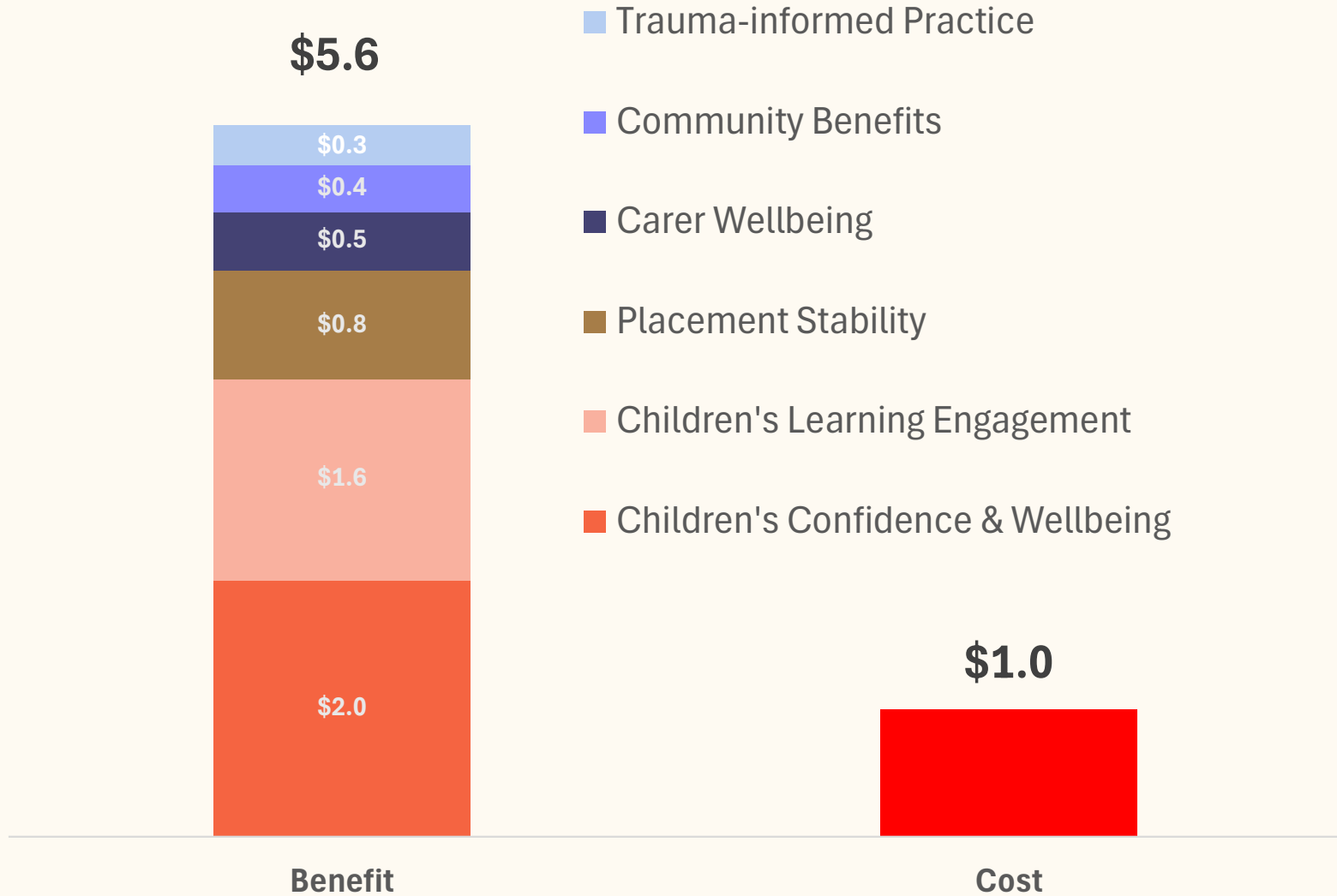


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SROI Results

Based on 2024 information applied to 400 Little Stars Learners students, investment of \$2.4m in Little Stars Learners creates \$13.3m in social and economic value across 6 key beneficiary groups. This is the equivalent of \$5.60 in social and economic value for every \$1 invested in the Little Stars Learners program.



Building Confidence and Wellbeing

The program's impacts in improving children's confidence and wellbeing represented 37% of the social and economic value created by Little Stars Learners.

“ [our foster child] was falling behind in school. He was living in a fog until Little Stars [Learners] came along. The tutors [education mentors] are lovely, with great empathy. They've helped him to understand it is ok to not understand something and to ask for help... He went from getting D's and C's to A's and B's. His confidence has improved to no end” – Foster carer, 12 year old child.

Increases in children's positive self-views

Children and young people experience benefits through the program in growing their confidence which extend far beyond the school and learning environment. They participate in more leadership and extracurricular opportunities, and experience improvements in their mental health that are enabled through the increases in confidence that participation in the program drives.

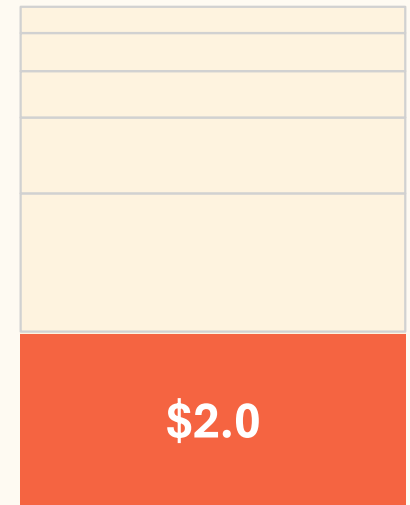


Benefit \$5.6

Changes in children's confidence, self-esteem and wellbeing

76% of carers reported observing moderate to great change in **confidence and self-esteem** for participating children and young people, with **56% of carers** reported moderate or higher levels of change in children's wellbeing, with carers and caseworkers speaking to the changes in children's confidence which they had observed in participating children.

76% of carers attributed a moderate or greater level of the **change in children's confidence and self-esteem** to Little Stars Learners Program's unique impact, with **65%** of carers attributed a moderate or greater level of the change in **children's wellbeing changes** to Little Stars Learner's unique impact



Engagement in Learning

Increased motivation and empowerment to engage in education and learning represented 28% of the social and economic value created by Little Stars Learners.

“ I have an 11 year old little fella; when I first became his caseworker two years ago, he was illiterate. He was only attending school for one hour a day, which was very limiting for his educational opportunities. When I met him, his goal was to read and write like the other kids around him. Little Stars has gotten him to a point where he sees himself as a learner... his reading is unbelievable now. His latest report card gives me goosebumps- he's got As and Bs. This is a direct result and outcome from the 1-on-1 from LittleStars” – Caseworker, NGO.

Increased motivation and empowerment to engage in education and learning

Children and young people are more engaged in their education as a result of their participation in Little Stars. Recognition of academic achievements and increased exposure to opportunities means children and young people are more excited about their future educational opportunities. This enables children and young people to see themselves as lifelong learners.

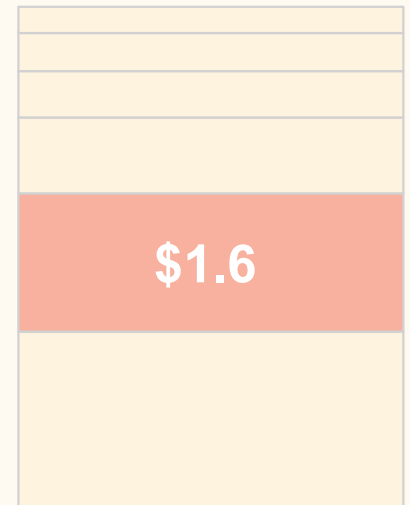


Benefit \$5.6

Changes in children’s education engagement progress and school participation

78% of surveyed carers observed that the Little Stars students in their care demonstrated significant change in **education engagement** in participating children and young people. Interviews and focus groups revealed positive changes in how children and young people in the program **viewed themselves as learners** and their ongoing **educational engagement**.

67% of surveyed carers attributed a moderate or greater level of the change in children’s **school engagement** to Little Stars Learners Program’s unique impact, while **58% of carers** attributed a moderate or greater level of the change in children’s **maths, reading and writing** outcomes to Little Stars



Supporting Placements

The program's impacts in improving harmony and stability in the child's placement represented **15%** of the social and economic value created by Little Stars Learners.

“With all that was happening in our kid's lives, it definitely improved placement stability for them. Little Stars was the one practical support they could rely on. They have experienced a lot of loss and instability in their lives. The program lets them build real relationships [with education mentors]. Other supports come and go in these kid's lives, but this is reliable, dependable support. It helps them overcome trauma and build relationships in their lives more broadly, and that definitely reduces breakdowns” – Residential Carer

Increases in household harmony

Children and young people experience benefits through the program's impacts on reducing conflict within their placement over homework and beyond. Carers and caseworkers reported that the reduction in conflict driven by their children and young people's participation in the program ultimately supporting placement stability.



Benefit \$5.6

Reducing conflict and increasing placement stability

50% of carers reported a **reduction of conflict in the home** regarding homework and school since their child or young person commenced the program, whilst **38% of carers reported** moderate to great changes in behaviours at home, with carers emphasising the program had reducing placement strain and conflict at home.

67% of carers attributed a moderate or greater level of the **reduction in conflict over homework and school** to the program, with **47% of carers** attributing a moderate or greater level of the change in **placement stability** to Little Stars Learner's unique impact.



Building Carer Wellbeing

The program's impacts in improving wellbeing for kinship and foster carers represented 8% of the social and economic value created by Little Stars Learners.

“ Before Little Stars, I was at breaking point. I was trying to help my grandson with his year ten schooling at home but it was negatively impacting our relationship. It was so tough... Our Little Stars mentor was magic. Their trauma informed training made such a difference. We took things slowly, and in one month there was massive change. Without Little Stars we wouldn't have been able to afford services for him. Now he has his sights set on a future... [The Little Stars team] really listened to us” – Kinship Carer



Increases in carer's feelings of satisfaction, support and confidence

Carers experience increases in confidence and wellbeing through their child or young person's participation in the program. The program's focus on supporting carers through reducing their load, sharing trauma-informed, evidence-based strategies with carers and reducing challenges in care enables carers to increase their wellbeing and sense of confidence in caring.

Changes in carer confidence and wellbeing

75% of carers reported feeling **greater sense of satisfaction** in caring since the commencement of their child or young person's participation in Little Stars Learners, with **67% of carers** reported **higher confidence**. Carers highlighted that the program had enabled them to retain time for themselves and was reducing their caring burden.

62% of carers indicated that Little Stars Learners played a moderate or greater impact on driving their increased **confidence in caring**, while **59%** of carers indicated that Little Stars Learners played a moderate or greater impact on driving their increased **satisfaction in caring**.

Benefit \$5.6

\$0.5



Broader Community Benefits

The program's impacts in enabling reducing long-term impacts of anti-social behaviour represented **7%** of the social and economic value created by Little Stars Learners.



"[the child's] father is in prison and when he started with us [the child] had incident reports at school frequently due to his violence. This hasn't happened all year. His behaviour has settled, he can communicate better. The comments in his report card talk to his effort, he is having opportunities for leadership in his school- this is a direct result of Little Stars" – Residential Carer

Building and encouraging pro-social behaviours

Through its focus on supporting children and young people to build meaningful relationships with Education Mentors and enable their growth of confidence, the program results in changes in children and young people's behaviours both within the school environment and beyond. These tangible changes modify the trajectories of participating children and young people.



Benefit \$5.6

\$0.4

Changes in behaviours outside of the home

68% of carers reported moderate or greater levels of increases in **positive feedback from teachers** since they commenced Little Stars Learners and **56% of carers** reported moderate or greater levels of increases in **positive feedback from others** in the child's life since they commenced Little Stars Learners, with carers reporting reduced school exclusion and suspension as key changes in their child.

69% of carers indicated that Little Stars Learners played a moderate or greater impact on driving their child's **positive teacher feedback** with **71%** of carers indicated that Little Stars Learners played a moderate or greater impact on driving their child's **positive feedback from others**



Driving Trauma-informed Practice

The program's impacts in enabling trauma-informed practice and skills development represented 5% of the social and economic value created by Little Stars Learners.



The program's trauma-informed lens is its real strength. Our kids don't do well in traditional education settings. It [Little Stars Learners] meets our kids where they are. There's careful consideration of matching children with tutors [Education Mentors], and kids get to be part of this process too. For the tutor to really have an understanding of the child's individual circumstances— that's what makes the difference. Kids feel special and seen. People around them see their strengths" – NGO Caseworker

Building trauma-informed practice for mentors and beyond

The program's focus on trauma-informed supports enables the development of specialised skills in its Education Mentors which they carry into their future careers in fields in Education and Psychology. Program refers feel that the considered selection of professionally aligned Mentors alongside the strength-focused framing of children and young people is core to its success.



Benefit \$5.6

	\$0.3

Changes in trauma-informed skills and development of applied experience

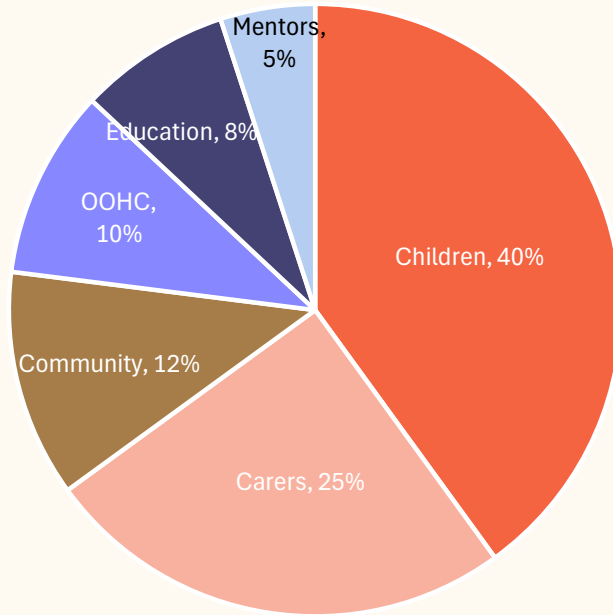
100% of surveyed Little Stars Education Mentors either agreed or strongly agreed that their experience at Little Stars strengthened their ability to work with children and young people, with over 40% of mentors currently completing graduate or postgraduate Psychology and Education studies that will enable them to continue to apply these skills.

Caseworkers described that trauma-informed reporting on children from the Little Stars Learners program had **shaped their views on the child and those of carers**, enabling them to **see the child's strengths and understand the child's behaviour** through a trauma-informed lens, describing this as impacting far beyond the child, carer and Education Mentor.



SROI Results

Based on 2024 information applied to 400 Little Stars Learners students, investment of \$2.4m creates \$13.3m in social and economic value across 6 key beneficiary groups. This is the equivalent of \$5.60 in social and economic value for every \$1 invested in the Little Stars Learners program.



Distribution of value by Little Stars	
Children	40%
Carers	25%
Community	12%
OOHC	10%
Education	8%
Education Mentors	5%

Outcome	Value (2024 dollars \$m)	% of total value
Children experience improved confidence, mental health and wellbeing	4.8	36.7
Children are motivated and empowered to engage in education and learning	3.7	28.0
Carers and children experience a more harmonious household and reduced risk of placement breakdown	2.1	15.2
Carers experience improved mental health and wellbeing	1.1	8.4
The community experiences reduced impacts of anti-social behaviour	0.9	6.5
Education mentors receive enhanced practical experience in working with children	0.7	5.2

**Value of outcomes \$13.3m / Total cost for 400 students \$2.4m
= SROI of \$5.60 for every \$1 invested**



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