

The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Disadvantaged Youth Program: Impact Summary 2021-2025

The program at a glance

What is it?

The Disadvantaged Youth Program removes financial barriers so young people facing disadvantage in Australia can participate in The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award—a structured youth development program proven to build confidence, resilience and practical skills.

Who does it reach?

Since 2015, the program has supported **12,658 young people**¹ who otherwise couldn't afford to participate: **48% more than targeted**.

Stage 3 (2021-2025)² reach:

- 4,989** disadvantaged young people supported³
- 71%** from low socio-economic backgrounds
- 55%** from regional and remote communities
- 18%** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people
- 26%** experiencing learning difficulties
- 5%** living with disability

Why it matters: the policy case

The Disadvantaged Youth Program directly delivers on Commonwealth education priorities set out in the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (2025-2034).

Keeping up: preventing dropout and disengagement

For many disadvantaged young people, staying engaged with school is a daily challenge. Duke of Ed changes that equation.

The impact:

- 60%** say they enjoy school more since starting Duke of Ed
- 94%** are learning to set their own goals
- 81%** report being better organised
- 61%** say their school results have improved

¹ Cumulative participants enrolled between May 2015 and December 2025, data provided by Duke of Ed National Office

² Current grant period. Activity started 3 November 2021 and ended 22 July 2024, subsequently extended to 31 December 2025.

³ Cumulative participants enrolled between November 2021 and December 2025, data provided by Duke of Ed National Office

*"I've become more productive. I've been given a motivation that I can achieve this, so I can achieve more in my schoolwork."
—Participant, Alice Springs*

Duke of Ed Leaders consistently report students who were on the verge of leaving school early but stayed engaged because of Duke of Ed. The peer connections, sense of achievement and recognition of non-academic strengths provide the motivation to keep showing up.

Finishing school: building pathways beyond Year 12

Completing Year 12 is critical, but so is being ready for what comes next. Duke of Ed builds the capabilities employers are seeking.

The impact:

- 92%** have developed skills useful for getting a job
- 92%** report improved communication skills
- 89%** are better at solving problems
- 88%** can cope better when things change

For many participants, Duke of Ed recognition contributes to their ATAR or provides the final credits needed to complete Year 12. But the bigger impact is the transformation in how young people see themselves and their future.

*"It is such a good thing to have on your resume. It shows that you can do something really hard to an employer."
—Participant*

Participants say that Duke of Ed is a valuable addition to their CV and e-portfolio, stands out in their online profiles and gives them skills that employers value.

Duke of Ed Leaders report that in every cohort, there are students who wouldn't have achieved Year 12 completion without Duke of Ed; not just because of the academic recognition, but because the program gave them a reason to stay.

Priority cohorts: delivering equity at scale

Educational disadvantage is not evenly distributed. The Disadvantaged Youth Program intentionally reaches the young people who face the greatest barriers.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people:** **18%** of participants, reflecting sustained place-based partnerships with communities.
- Regional and remote communities:** **55%** of participants come from outside major cities, where opportunity is often scarce.
- Low socio-economic backgrounds:** **71%** of participants, for whom the cost of participation (equipment, transport, registration fees) would otherwise be prohibitive.
- Young people with disability or learning difficulties:** **31%** combined, with the flexible program design allowing genuine participation, not just token inclusion.

This is not an accident. The program consistently reaches these cohorts, year after year, because it removes the single biggest barrier: cost.



Wellbeing: building resilience and connection

Disadvantaged young people face disproportionate mental health challenges. Duke of Ed provides protective factors that matter.

The impact:

- 95%** feel proud of what they've achieved
- 89%** report increased confidence
- 89%** say they don't give up as easily
- 88%** can cope better when things change
- 85%** can cope better with stress and challenges

"A great program that really pushes you to your limits. It's incredible to find how much stronger, both mentally and physically, you become after the adventurous journeys."
—Participant

The 2021 evaluation occurred during COVID-19 lockdowns, and every wellbeing indicator dropped. By 2025, they've all returned to pre-pandemic levels. Duke of Ed didn't just sustain young people through disruption, it helped them recover.

Many young people, four stories

Hassan: from uncertain to unstoppable

Duke of Ed Graduate, Plumpton High School (Western Sydney)

Hassan started Duke of Ed in Year 9 with no idea what he was getting into. "Honestly, I knew nothing about it. I thought it was just like Scouts."

What he discovered changed his trajectory. Through Bronze, Silver and Gold, he developed goal-setting skills, time management and resilience. Today he's studying biomedical science at university, working part-time supporting other Duke of Ed participants and running a photography business inspired by his Duke of Ed skill activity.

"Goal setting was huge. Whenever I sit down now, I think about what I want to achieve, not just doing something for the sake of it... Without the Award [Duke of Ed], I would still be wondering what I wanted to do in the future."

Melissa: when funding removes the barrier

Duke of Ed Graduate, Gold Level

Melissa's Duke of Ed journey nearly ended before it began. When costs became a barrier, her family questioned whether she could continue. Disadvantaged Youth Program funding changed everything.

"That funding was a tipping point. Without it, I would have missed out on all these opportunities and skills."

She went on to complete Gold, developing time management, leadership and communication skills she now uses in her university studies in international relations and part-time work. The challenges—balancing volunteer commitments with HSC demands, leading hikes, managing the logs—taught her accountability and persistence.



"The Duke of Ed is something you'll carry for life. You'll do things you never imagined and grow in ways you can't predict."

St Helens: small town, big transformations

St Helens District High School, Tasmania

In this small coastal Tasmanian town where some young people are technically homeless, Duke of Ed struggled for years with only one or two participants annually. With Disadvantaged Youth Program funding, that changed dramatically: 31 students signed up in 2025.

The impact is visible. Students who started the year shy and uncertain now stand up and share their Duke of Ed stories at the annual ceremony. They visit a local nursing home regularly, learning about respect, empathy and compassion. They've hiked the Freycinet Peninsula and the Walls of Jerusalem, sometimes through snow, discovering resilience they didn't know they had.

"You learn good life skills... We know what we are going to have to do when we're older... I've used it on my resumé, and I now have a part-time job in town."

Centralian Middle School: turning a life around

Alice Springs, Northern Territory

One student barely attended school in Year 7. Once he signed up for Duke of Ed, everything changed: he turned up every day, stayed all day, completed Bronze and is now continuing to Silver. His school performance improved from not attending to getting Bs and Cs.

He's one of 39 participants at Centralian Middle School, where students come from low SES backgrounds and many have experienced trauma, domestic violence or alcohol abuse. Through Duke of Ed, they're learning to be "comfortable with being uncomfortable" and developing as leaders.

For community service, students prepare food for a local foodbank and events, giving them both practical skills and connection to community. Some have used these food preparation skills to get part-time jobs.

"I've learnt new skills, things that are really useful for after school... The big hike made me more resilient. I didn't really want to do it beforehand, but I had to, and then I realised I really enjoyed it."

The evidence: consistent results over ten years

Three independent evaluations (2018, 2021, 2025) show remarkably stable results:

Outcome	2018	2021	2025
Improved confidence	95%	91%	89%
Better at communicating	95%	88%	92%
Better at solving problems	92%	84%	89%
Can cope when things change	92%	88%	88%
Feel proud of achievement	97%	95%	95%

Results show that the program delivers consistent outcomes across different cohorts, different contexts and different timeframes—including recovery from COVID-19 disruption.



The value proposition

Cost-effective intervention	The program leverages existing Duke of Ed infrastructure (State Offices, Duke of Ed delivery networks, volunteer Duke of Ed Leaders and assessors). It doesn't build new systems—it removes financial barriers to access existing, proven programs.
Proven delivery	Over three funding cycles, the program has exceeded targets every time. The delivery model is mature, reliable and scalable.
Policy-aligned outcomes	Every outcome the program delivers aligns with current Commonwealth education priorities: engagement, equity, wellbeing, transitions.
Protective benefits	For disadvantaged young people, Duke of Ed provides protective factors against disengagement, poor mental health and limited post-school pathways.
Sustained impact	Graduates report that Duke of Ed influences their trajectory years later—in how they approach challenges, in their willingness to try new things, in their sense of what they can achieve.

What happens without this program?

Without Commonwealth funding, thousands of disadvantaged young people each year lose access to Duke of Ed. This isn't about missing out on an optional enrichment activity.

For many participants, Duke of Ed is the difference between:

- **Staying in school** vs. dropping out
- **Completing Year 12** vs. leaving without credentials
- **Building resilience** vs. struggling with mental health challenges
- **Developing employment skills** vs. entering the workforce unprepared
- **Pride in achievement** vs. internalising failure.

The cost of not funding this program isn't measured in dollars. It's measured in lost potential, in young people who disengage, in pathways that close before they open, further contributing to education inequity.

The recommendation

The evidence is clear: the Disadvantaged Youth Program works. It reaches the right young people, delivers outcomes aligned with policy priorities, and provides protective benefits that extend well beyond The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award itself.

For an Australian Government committed to educational equity and delivering on the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement objectives, this program represents a proven mechanism for translating policy into impact.

Continued funding is recommended.

