***Ronald McDonald Learning Program (RMLP)***

**Proposal for Support**

**Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC) is seeking funding to assist with the growing demand on our services. RMHC will continue the same level of support and will utilise the current resources and infrastructure so that 100% of the government support will go directly to assist more students recovering from serious illness.**

**$2.5M over 4 years will enable us to increase services and meet demand across Australia ensuring students do not need to wait for this valuable service.**

**Currently more than 1,200 students are receiving vital educational support each week to remediate the impact of missed schooling due to illness. The Ronald McDonald Learning Program (RMLP) is scalable and able to meet the individual education needs of students with serious illness.**

**Overview**

The Ronald McDonald Learning Program (RMLP) is the leading well–being and education program in Australia supporting students with serious health conditions catch up on missed education due to their illness.

Due to medical advances more children than ever before are now long term survivors of serious health conditions and returning to classrooms. Shorter hospital stays mean the majority of these students spend their convalescence at home and away from any educational support such as a hospital schools or home school.

In collaboration with the home school a comprehensive support package is available for each student and may include;

* Psychometric & academic assessment,
* Speech and/or occupational assessment & therapy
* Up to 40 hours of face to face tuition with a fully qualified teacher.

RMHC invests on average $5.2M each year which enables 1,200 – 1,300 students access the RMLP each week.

**The Issue**

* Many students who are managing serious illness and schooling are a mostly hidden group due to three factors:
* **Invisibility** – the nature of many chronic illnesses result in high levels of absenteeism;
* **Identification** – many fail to recognise that illness and health conditions are in fact classed as disabilities under the DDA and;
* **Knowledge** – from research and feedback from families as well as the charity’s own experience working in this educational space, there is a general lack of knowledge about the learning impacts of serious illness.
* A 2015 study found that 62% of Australian child cancer survivors developed special education needs following treatment, yet less than 10% received government-funded school support.
* To provide appropriate support allows the student to go on and experience a successful education. To ignore this cohort has the potential to decrease educational success, impact on their life trajectory and the potential of low socio-economic status in adulthood. (White, 2015)

**Snapshot of the RMLP across Australia**

* RMHC spreads its donated revenue between a variety of programs including its 18 Ronald McDonald Houses which accommodate up to 470 families each night.
* RMHC would like to eliminate current wait lists for the RMLP. Currently there is no promotion of the RMLP as we do not want more students on our waitlist missing out on vital educational support.
* Students do not need to have stayed at a Ronald McDonald House to access the RMLP. Any student who has missed lengthy periods off school due to illness is eligible to receive support.
* The RMLP is available for students across all school sectors and services students in metropolitan, rural and remote areas.
* We currently offer face to face tutoring focusing on the students need and help reduce stress and anxiety due to missed school because illness and treatment.
* We are piloting an extension of the Learning Program that focuses on mental health to ensure that students with mental health issues are also not left behind.
* On average RMHC Australia expends approximately $4800 per school aged student supported by the RMLP. This cost is inclusive of case management, assessments and associated therapies if required.
* Due to increasing demand for the RMLP nationally, our funds available for this program are limited.
* The RMLP, unlike schools, is able to offer a flexible model of delivery. The very nature of serious illness or injury means that students often need to change their day and time to receive tutoring due to medical follow up treatments or from being unwell. We currently offer up to 40 hours of tutoring over a school year.

**The Results**

An evaluation by Professor Heather Jenkins (School of Education, Curtain University) found that the RMLP is providing valuable support to children returning to school after extended periods of hospitalisation.

This study assessed the children’s levels of academic achievement. All children were assessed with respect to their levels of achievement and their self-concept. Self-concept was included because the research evidence shows that perceptions of self are very important with respect to positive attitudes towards learning. Given the challenges confronted by children who have undergone long periods of hospitalisation and missed significant periods of schooling, they may also have acquired a learning difficulty as a consequence of their treatment. (Ashman & Merrotsy, 2009).

*“The relationship between my child and the tutor was a joyful one, and the feedback we received was entirely affirming. She was once again defined as a learner and felt hopeful that she could return to school full time and integrate with her peers in the classroom. This was life affirming”.*

Parent of student recovering from Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia.

The study concluded the following:

*After 38 weekly hours of tutoring, the RMLP program led to improvements in academic*

*achievement with respect to the following:*

* *Word reading*
* *Reading comprehension*
* *Pseudo word decoding*
* *Numerical operations*
* *Maths reasoning*
* *Spelling*
* *Listening comprehension*
* *Oral Expression”*

The following graphs are just two examples which illustrate the average gains that the students demonstrated after being on the RMLP program.

The Program International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 report, outlines that reading performance levels have been steadily decreasing from originally high levels since Australia first participated in 2000. Even though national reading levels are declining students with the support of the Learning Program according to Jenkins (2009) will increase their reading levels significantly.

This study demonstrated that all the children had improvements in the areas of; total self-concept, behavioural adjustment, physical appearance and freedom from anxiety.

This work by Jenkins “*demonstrates that the boys and girls within the study have improved in their total self-concept, moving up from just below the normal average of 50 to scores that exceed this range. This is a good outcome and suggests that the children were starting to view themselves more positively as a consequence of their participation in the RMLP tutoring program.”*

According to the OECD report Australian students reported being bullied frequently, felt more afraid of failing, and were more likely to have skipped school and feel lonely at school. Students with serious chronic illness without support when returning to school are particularly vulnerable and therefore it is extremely important, they receive additional support such as the Ronald McDonald Learning Program.

*‘It has made the most profound difference to how Max is functioning in the classroom, targeting his numeracy”*

Parent of student recovering from transplant

An independent social return on investment (SROI) is being undertaken by Social Ventures Australia (SVA) for RMHC. The work was completed after surveying 385 RMLP families and 230 teachers and discovered that ‘more than 85% of families felt better able to support their child’s learning and over 90% agreed their child’s education had benefited’. This work also demonstrated that 10% of students in the RMLP would have repeated a year of school, which would have cost the education system approx. $14,234 for each student therefore a saving of **$1,708,040 each year**!

These results replicate the anecdotal testimonies we receive from families, students and teachers regularly.

References

1. Jenkins, H. (2009). An evaluation of the Ronald McDonald Learning Program (RMLP) to determine its impact on improving the achievement and self-concept of West Australian children who have missed significant amounts of schooling due to prolonged hospitalisation *School of Education, Curtin University of Technology,* Perth, Western Australia.
2. Social Ventures Australia (2019) Ronald McDonald House Charities Australia Social Return on Investment. Draft report.
3. White, J. & Rosauer, K. (2015).  Young Australians, Illness and Education: Report on the National Database Project. *The Victorian Institute, Victoria University*, Melbourne, Australia.
4. OECD, Australia - Country Note (Volume 1-11, 2019) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Results from Pisa 2018,