



Brotherhood of St Laurence  
Working for an Australia free of poverty

## MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 5am, Monday 7 May, 2012

### **Budget's big boost to Home Interaction early learning program puts more children on path to positive future**

The doubling in size of the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY) to 100 communities is welcome news for children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds around Australia, the Brotherhood of St Laurence said today.

"This great early-learning program not only helps disadvantaged children get a better start in life by working with their parents to prepare them for school, it is also a pathway into work for the people from their communities who are trained to be home tutors," said Tony Nicholson, Executive Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, which manages the program across Australia in partnership with local organisations that are respected in each community.

"I know from the Brotherhood's experience of establishing HIPPY in 50 communities, after the Federal Labor Government funded it for four years in its first budget in 2008, that many communities need and want this type of program and will welcome the opportunity to have it for local children and families," Mr Nicholson said.

"We are delighted that that the Federal Government is making this further commitment to HIPPY because it helps parents in turn help their children on to the right path to a fulfilling and productive life in adulthood. This is because HIPPY is a great way of helping children gain a flying start at school, which is so important to their future education and beyond that their working life.

"A good education is the best pathway out of poverty because it lays the foundations for a rewarding working life. But we all know that kids who start school behind often have trouble catching up. Being behind in class can be demoralizing and make it more likely that youngsters drop out of school early or fail to go on to further education – and in turn this can make getting a secure job more difficult.

"A rigorous evaluation report undertaken last year for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) found that the program's critical early intervention was highly effective in improving the performance at school of a HIPPY child versus a child that did not take part in the program.

"The evaluation report found that HIPPY can close the 'school readiness' gap between disadvantaged children and other children. When children started the program their literacy and numeracy skills were on average up to 30 per cent below the Australian norm. But after two years of HIPPY, that gap closed."

Mr Nicholson said HIPPY's approach of empowering parents and building community strength also made it a good fit for the Federal Government's focus on increasing school engagement among Indigenous children to "Close the Gap" in educational attainment.

“In total 39 of the 50 existing HIPPY communities include Indigenous parents and children,” he said. “The evaluation report last year found that other Indigenous communities would benefit from an increased Government commitment to HIPPY. It’s wonderful news that this commitment is now taking place.”

See the evaluation report, “Investing in our future”, at <http://www.hippyaustralia.org.au/file/2377/> or [http://www.bsl.org.au/pdfs/Investing\\_in\\_our\\_future\\_HIPPY\\_National\\_Rollout\\_Evaluation\\_FinalReport\\_2011.pdf](http://www.bsl.org.au/pdfs/Investing_in_our_future_HIPPY_National_Rollout_Evaluation_FinalReport_2011.pdf)

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## HIPPY AT A GLANCE

- HIPPY is a two-year, home-based parenting and early childhood enrichment program run by the Brotherhood of St Laurence in partnership with local organisations in disadvantaged communities that gives parents the skills to be their child’s first teacher, starting in the year before primary school.
- The program also offers HIPPY tutors from the same communities, who are often first involved as parents, a supportive pathway to employment and community leadership. Three quarters of the HIPPY tutors were previously unemployed and not involved in education or training. The accredited training and employment provided by the program put them on a path back into the workforce.
- The evaluation report for DEEWR, “Investing in our future”, found that:
  - At the beginning of the program HIPPY children’s cognitive development—numeracy and literacy skills—were on average up to 30 percent below the Australian norm. But after two years of HIPPY, that gap had closed.
  - HIPPY children were found to read more and be better behaved.
  - The return on investment to Australian society was found to be between \$2.53 and \$4.00 for every dollar spent on HIPPY.
  - HIPPY was remarkably cost-effective in comparison to similar programs overseas.
  - HIPPY parents felt more confident, supported and respected in their role of raising their child
  - They adopted significantly less angry or hostile parenting styles
  - Parents spent more time with their child and had greater contact with their child’s school.
  - The rate of HIPPY parents in the paid work increased by 50%.
- More than 3500 Australian families have been involved in the program. For more information, see the HIPPY Australia website at [www.hippyaustralia.org.au](http://www.hippyaustralia.org.au) and the Brotherhood of St Laurence website at [www.bsl.org.au](http://www.bsl.org.au).