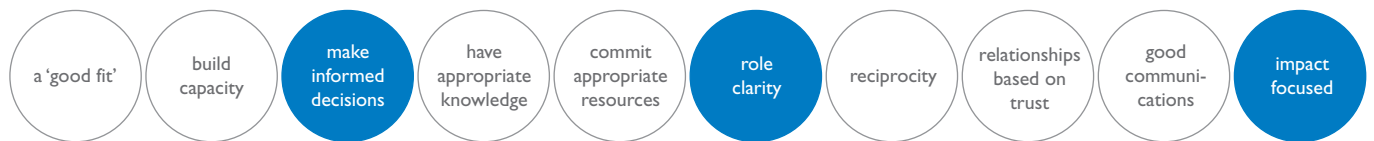


# Case 8: School Passport System

(Philanthropic grant to a not-for-profit for a program with schools)



**Priority areas:** student engagement, community partnerships

## About School Passport System

The Community Development Foundation (CDF) initiated the School Passport System in low socio-economic areas where student attendance and parent engagement are serious challenges. The initiative seeks to increase the active participation and engagement of parents in school and increase student attendance. Parents can exchange an hourly commitment to the school in return for 'credits'. One hour equates to ten points, which in turn equates to one school dollar.

Activities are decided by the school and may include involvement on the Parents and Citizens (P&C) Committee; working with teachers in the classroom and on excursions. School dollars can then be redeemed on the school site for items such as school uniforms; food and drink at the canteen; stationary; to help pay for excursions/incursions; and other items such as school photos or swimming lessons. A system for recognising students who reach attendance milestones is also part of the initiative. So far, sixty-three schools across Western Australia and South Australia participate in the initiative.

To learn more, visit: <http://thecdf.com.au/>

## About Fogarty Foundation

The Fogarty Foundation was established in May 2000 by Annie and Brett Fogarty.

The Foundation aims to "deliver education opportunities that support people to achieve their potential and inspire community leadership".

They focus their investment, energy and skill on initiatives with a strong **education** basis. The Foundation aims to foster over a wide spectrum within the community a sense of **leadership**, and they look for maximum impact through the sharing and **dissemination** of knowledge and skills.

Financial investment is only one means of assistance and, as the Foundation matures, they believe they can also contribute by encouraging others to join in the spirit of philanthropy and share their knowledge and connections.

To learn more, visit: <http://fogartyfoundation.org.au/>

### What we discovered

*Make informed decisions* – think how your initiative might be replicated. If you cannot share it, then forget it.

*Role clarity* – Parents give their time because that is what they can give. So build on that.

*Effective communication* – Sometimes it pays to shut up and listen. Start where people are 'at', not where you think they should be at.

*Impact* – Social change does take time. Build momentum through gathering information on what is changing. Supporters can then see that what they are putting in is leading to a result.

## Making informed decisions

“For children to learn and succeed, you need parents *involved* in your school” asserts Jenny Day, Founding Director along with Barry Cable of the Community Development Foundation. With a background in research and about 13 years of experience behind her since starting the School Passport System initiative, Jenny Day knows that increasing the regular school attendance of students can be a major problem for many principals. In turn, when a student regularly misses school this can have lasting negative impacts on his or her learning and life outcomes. The School Passport System is an incentive-based initiative that seeks to address the issues of increasing parent or carer engagement and student attendance at school. It does so by putting parents at the centre of their child’s health, wellbeing, learning and achievement.

Always keep the end in mind. Stay focused.

“Parents are the primary motivators for getting their child to attend school”, Jenny explains.

“It’s hard to get a vision across to a five-year old that they need to attend school, when the parent does not necessarily understand or share that same vision.” Over the years, Jenny has encountered many reasons for this disconnect. For some parents this is because they believe that the school has all the answers and therefore they, as parents, do not have a role to play. For others, it is because they feel embarrassed that they do not know what their child is talking about and therefore how they can play a role in their child’s learning. Then there are those parents whose own experience of school was negative and so do not want to have a role. The bottom line, as Jenny concludes, is that “some parents don’t value school. So you need to create a concrete value so that parents or carers can associate a positive value with school.” This is an important premise underpinning the School Passport System.

Jenny says the concept for the School Passport System was also informed by “thinking and keeping the end in mind”. Three pillars support the growth and development of the Community Development Foundation initiatives: motivation, evaluation and recognition. For the School Passport System to succeed, Jenny says that it had to talk to parents and had to put in place ways of knowing what was working and not working in the initiative. Last, but not least, recognition of commitment and achievements had to be built into the fabric of the initiative. All three pillars, Jenny stresses, are necessary for beneficiaries and for those developing and running the initiative.

Taking the Passport System from concept to practice was informed by the experiences of a previous parent-school engagement project, called the Mother of All Sheds (MOASHs). Thanks to a grant from Lottery West, a place where parents could gather was built in 13 schools in Western Australia. “We did it”, says Jenny “because how many times have you been into a school only to find that there is no place where parents can sit, no cups that parents can use and overall, just no place for parents ‘to be’ and to be part of the school”.

From the MOASHs project, the School Passport System began in a small way with a couple of schools participating. “We started with the idea of putting a sticker of a star on the wall if parents of kids with poor attendance came along to the school”, recalls Jenny. The schools would use this form of recognition system because as Jenny says, “people love recognition and they like collecting things”. From here, the idea of the stars being traded in by the parent for a “second currency” was born.

Projects can start small and be inspired by many things.

## Role clarity

A unique feature of the School Passport System’s adoption in schools is that the Community Development Foundation will not initiate an approach to a school. Ultimately, the decision to initiate the School Passport System and what the ‘passport’ focus will be rests with the parents of a school. Having this clarity around who does what and when is important for procedural clarity but it also reinforces the role that the Foundation believes parents play in their child’s education. “If the parents want it and they have identified a specific area of need where the school could be doing better, then we are all ears.” At least five new schools per week approach the Community Development Foundation.

The Community Development Foundation plays a key role in facilitating the development of products and processes that overcome barriers so that all parents can participate. An example is a Guide about the School Passport System. The Foundation has developed and had the Guide translated into twelve different languages. Another example is the Foundation’s role with the justice system. The ‘passport’ has been extended to include those parents who are incarcerated in correctional facilities. The Foundation has taken on this role so, among other reasons, they can assist in developing and strengthening the ongoing partnership between incarcerated parents

and their child's school. The Foundation has devised, in collaboration with the correctional facility and school, ways in which these parents can undertake activities while incarcerated. This means they too can trade their hours on activities as currency for their child's benefit.

Who sources the funds for the School Passport System is also clearly defined. It takes about \$15,000 per school per year to run a 'passport' initiative. "You need a combination of philanthropic, business and government funding" states Jenny. Each year, the Department of Education and Training in Western Australia provides a grant that supports the student attendance prong of the School Passport System. Jenny notes, "If the school sees the 'passport' as an avenue for addressing parent engagement and student absences, then they too get involved in seeking the funding". Often this will involve schools connecting with their local businesses.

The Fogarty Foundation's role with the Community Development Foundation extends beyond funding. They like to come out and see first-hand the School Passport System in action. Jenny explains that she meets every three months with Annie Fogarty, the Executive Chairperson of Fogarty Foundation. During these meetings, Jenny provides an update on the initiative's progress and any new developments. The more that the Fogarty Foundation understands the initiative, "the more they are engaged" says Jenny and "the more they are able to play a role in networking us with others who might also be interested in supporting us."

## Good communications

At the local community level, word of mouth about the School Passport System is powerful. "Nothing", says Jenny, "breeds success, like success." Jenny explains how this works. "The parents from one school will tell another parent in another school about the initiative. They will also look at our website and see examples of what other parents are doing." This learning from each other approach is an effective way to build capacity and also communicate about the initiative. As each 'passport' is locally driven, "it's not a competition" reflects Jenny. "Instead, schools and parents can see ideas that others have tried and consider whether the idea might work also in their context."

'Word of mouth' is a very powerful communication tool; it can be an effective way of sharing experiences and lesson learnt, as well as an indicator of 'success'.

Between the school and the Community Development Foundation, the passports themselves are an important source of information. The information gathered in the passports assists schools with the compliance aspects of the initiative, such as accounting for the number of hours being claimed on an invoice that the school puts into the Community Development Foundation once per term.



Tranby Primary School, Western Australia

In the regular face-to-face catch-ups with the Fogarty Foundation and others supporting the initiative, Jenny is able to state clearly where the dollars they have invested have gone. She is able to do this because the Community Development Foundation has been clear about the issues they are tackling through the initiative and what outcomes they are seeking to see as a result. Furthermore, they have been clear about what and how information will be gathered to indicate improvement. As Jenny states, “we can say, 70 parents who never came near this school are now involved in the school doing X,Y and Z”.

## Impact

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All of the Community Development Foundation's initiatives are externally evaluated by Dr Susan Young from the Social Work and Social Policy School at the University of Western Australia. The funding for evaluation comes from private sources. Each term both qualitative and quantitative information is gathered from the parents, principal and teachers of participating schools in the School Passport Initiative. The survey is easily accessible on the Community Development Foundation's website. It includes questions about the number of parents involved in the initiative, what types of activities they are involved in and whether positive changes in, for example, the quality of parent-teacher relations and student attendance is evident.

Through these forms of feedback, schools from disadvantaged areas are reporting increases in student attendance, parent

Surveys to capture data should be simple and easily accessible.

self-esteem, rapport and trust between school staff and parents. The feedback is indicating that parents are more actively engaged in the school than they were prior to the School Passport System. This is reflected in the number and diversity of activities (e.g. Breakfast Clubs and canteens can be run more often, a quorum is reached at the P&Cs), as well as evidence of parents now making resources for the school to use (e.g. reading resources for use at home as well as in school so children can catch up and improve their skills). Some parents have reengaged with learning by, for example, getting their bus license so now they can get their children to and from school.

The initiative is resulting in long-term sustainable changes in parent and student engagement in both regional and metropolitan communities. The initiative began in education but has expanded into other areas, such as into a Justice Link adaptation of the School Passport System in six correctional facilities. There is also the case of the initiative in one school being opened up to all parents, not just those with children who have a poor attendance track record.

## Postscript

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Jenny will be working with staff from the Melbourne Business School, who have funding from The Trust Company, to further track the impact of the School Passport System. The Trust Company appointed the Melbourne Business School to evaluate recipient's grants awarded last year in their Engaged Philanthropy Program. The Community Development Foundation received a 3-year grant for their evaluation.