

## ***Australian Schools Plus and St.George Foundation: Helping to bridge the education gap to build the next generation of Australia's STEM workforce***

- *Almost 30% of 15-year-olds in Australia do not meet the international benchmark standard in mathematics, reading and science and Indigenous students [in Australia] are on average 2.5 years behind their non-Indigenous peers in maths and science achievement at the age of 15*
- *Rural, remote and regional students are falling behind due to limited access to technology compared with their metropolitan counterparts*
- *St.George Foundation's Inspire Grant will help thousands of children facing disadvantage access STEM education opportunities through Schools Plus's innovative Virtual STEM Academy Program*

**St.George Foundation** is proud to announce **Australian Schools Plus (Schools Plus)** as the recipient of its 2021 Inspire Grant to drive the expansion of an innovative Virtual STEM Academy Program that will increase access to STEM education for more than 10,000 young people who are experiencing disadvantage over the next three years.

The \$596,000 grant will enable the highly successful model, established by the Queensland Virtual STEM Academy that has so far reached over 4450 students across 252 Queensland schools, to expand and embed in NSW and the Northern Territory, in the next stage towards a national program.

St.George Foundation's Inspire Grant is awarded to one eligible Australian children's charity each year to support innovative programs that provide alternative pathways to education, and help children experiencing disadvantage in Australia to reach their full potential.

According to the Federal Government's Innovation Statement, an estimated 75 per cent of jobs in the fastest-growing industries require workers with STEM skills, but the number of Australian students studying science and maths in high school are dropping. This is further exacerbated by an inequality in access to technology-based learning for students in low-socioeconomic households and remote areas.

Tara Beath, Acting Chief Executive St.George Foundation said that the goal of the Inspire Grant is to ensure access to quality education for as many young people as possible, regardless of their location or background.

"We want all young people to be set for success, which means every child should be afforded an excellent education that builds capacity in problem solving, inquiry, critical thinking and creativity. The Virtual STEM Academy Program will deliver courses through a real time online learning platform and provide opportunities for young people to access innovative STEM enrichment programs they might otherwise not have the opportunity to due to circumstances beyond their control.

Importantly, the program can also transcend accessibility challenges such as geographical distance, drought, bushfires, affordability issues for schools and periods of lockdowns or physical restrictions imposed by COVID-19. Crucially, it will help to improve educational outcomes for students

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experiencing disadvantage now, giving all children an equal opportunity to access the jobs of the future.”

St.George Foundation was inspired by Schools Plus’s system-wide approach to its Virtual STEM Academy Program that will help to even the playing field among schools.

Bridging the education gap is more important than ever in the age of technology. Rapid change has given rise to greater urgency in ensuring children and young people continue to have access to and receive STEM education to prepare for the future of work.

Rosemary Conn, Chief Executive Officer Schools Plus said that funding from St George Foundation will provide a crucial launching pad at a critical time.

“A workforce with strong STEM skills is essential to keeping the Australian economy growing. Digital innovation alone can potentially deliver \$315 billion in gross economic value to Australia in the next 10 years. The courses offered at the Academy are designed using research-based teaching approaches and enable students to collaborate with university and industry experts to solve 21st century STEM challenges.

We work closely with teachers and schools with a particular focus on engaging with under-represented groups, including Indigenous Australians, females and those in regional, rural and remote locations to empower them with the funding, coaching and resources they need to help students succeed. Increasing STEM literacy is a vital pathway to long-term employment opportunities for current and future generations that will lead to sustainable, fulfilling, and secure lives.”

St.George Foundation is also pleased to award **Chain Reaction Foundation** and **Youth Off The Streets** with \$50,000 each for their respective programs.

Chain Reaction Foundation supports at-risk young people by equipping them with essential behavioural skills to engage, more confidently, in their education and create better futures for themselves, their families and their communities. Youth Off The Streets is also helping at-risk young people to turn their lives around by providing safety, support and opportunities to empower them to build more positive futures.

Since 1990, St.George Foundation has partnered with over 800 community organisations and invested more than \$35 million to positively impact the lives of thousands of children experiencing disadvantage in Australia.

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## **About St.George Foundation**

St.George Foundation was established by St.George Bank in 1990. Since that time, it has partnered with more than 800 community organisations across Australia to invest more than \$35 million to help to provide a brighter future for children in Australia who are experiencing physical, social or economic disadvantage.

## **About the St.George Foundation Inspire Grant**

Every year, St.George Foundation's Inspire Grant provides up to \$200,000 per year for three years to one eligible Australian children's charity. The grant is designed to provide innovative interventions that will change the course of a child's life through access to education. The Inspire Grant is designed to help children who are impacted by physical, social or economic disadvantage through innovative programs that provide alternative pathways to education.

To find out more about the St.George Foundation Inspire Grant, visit [stgeorgefoundation.com.au](http://stgeorgefoundation.com.au) or email [stgeorgefoundation@stgeorge.com.au](mailto:stgeorgefoundation@stgeorge.com.au)

## **About Australian Schools Plus**

Australian Schools Plus (Schools Plus) is a national charity that helps children facing disadvantage succeed at school. Their purpose is to close the education gap and ensure all young people in Australia reach their potential through access to a great education.

For more information, visit [www.schoolsplus.org.au](http://www.schoolsplus.org.au).

## **Previous winners of the Inspire Grant:**

- Cathy Freeman Foundation (2020) – helping Indigenous children and their families in some of the most remote communities in Australia to recognise the power of education to achieve their goals and dreams
- PCYC (2019) – for their Fit to Learn Program that works to empower and equip vulnerable young people to re-engage with school or other educational pathways through Police and community partnerships
- Whitelion (2018) – provides a short-term solution for young women aged 12-17 who have been suspended from school with a less formal, flexible environment that maintains educational momentum, with life skills workshops and learning sessions
- MissingSchool (2017) – dedicated to bridging educational and social gaps experienced by children with serious medical conditions by providing telepresence robots to continue their connection to their regular school