



Stronger Smarter Leadership

To create high expectations, excellence-oriented school cultures.

"...if we believe in young children, we give them license to believe in themselves. And when young children believe they can be stronger and smarter, that brightens the future in very honourable ways."

**Archbishop Desmond Tutu
Stronger Smarter Institute National Summit 2012**

Our Vision

Stronger Smarter communities enabling all people to honour and affirm positive identities and cultures, whilst thriving in contemporary societies

Our Philosophy

The Stronger Smarter philosophy honours a positive sense of cultural identity, and acknowledges and embraces positive community leadership, enabling innovative and dynamic approaches and processes that are anchored by high expectations relationships.

High expectations relationships honour the humanity of others, and in doing so, acknowledge one's strengths, capacity and human right to emancipatory opportunity.





stronger smarter
institute

About us

The Stronger Smarter Institute is committed to changing the tide of low expectations in Indigenous education in Australia. We work with school and community leaders in pursuit of high expectations and high-performance school cultures. Many schools across the country have made significant inroads and laid solid foundations in the creation of Stronger Smarter inclusive, strength-based school cultures.



Transformation through Leadership

There exists in Australia, as does in other parts of the world, an urgent need for quality leadership in schools. Nowhere is this more imperative than within marginalised and resource-poor communities. Within the education system many children struggle against a culture of low expectations and stifled perceptions of who they are. Their self-esteem, achievements and ambitions can be, and so often are, deeply corroded. Attaining excellence in learning for all children may require significant school community transformation, which is essentially about shifting and renewing school cultures. Our approach is founded on belief and experience that any group of people usually already holds the collective knowledge and wisdom to successfully meet the complex challenges they face.

“Stronger Smarter for me was unlike any other professional learning. All other programs I’ve been to concentrate on specific academic teachings. The Stronger Smarter program taught me not only skills that help in the school context but the philosophical underpinnings are incredible!!! Everyone that leaves is not just a better teacher, Principal etc., but a better person”

Program Participant, 2012

Successful use of this knowledge and wisdom requires deep listening, reflection, collective sense-making and decision-making processes. Grounded in strength of identity and the positivism of success, people are able to uncover and own habitual patterns that enable or disable them from meeting particular challenges and other ways of thinking, seeing, talking and doing can be practiced and embedded. The transformational leadership experiences created by the Institute’s programs have contributed to school and community leaders working alongside each other for improved Indigenous student attendance, positive numeracy and literacy outcomes, and increased engagement of Indigenous children and their families in learning that really matters. Ultimately it is the Institute’s vision that the Stronger Smarter philosophy of high-expectations, excellence-oriented school cultures will be embedded throughout self-sustaining networks, creating a balance between individuality and social connectedness, so that Australian schools are places where all children ‘dream the great dreams’, and classrooms are designed to collude only with a stronger, smarter student identity.



Leadership Program Participants 2024

Participants have described the program as intense, stimulating, challenging and full of humour and personal involvement.

“On a deeply profound level it made me evaluate myself, my identity as an individual and how I brought that to my perceived role as a principal and a person.” Participant

“I realise more that these strategies and philosophies are not only relative to Indigenous communities, but quite global.” Group School Assistant Principal

“It reinforced that though there are long-term, complex issues that seem to continually evolve and develop, my part within them is important, and I understand that I am a part within the global change to these issues... that through changes within myself I can contribute to building solutions to the whole.” Principal

“This has been a very thought provoking workshop and has given me the motivation to get back out and take the next step. The friendships and networks I have developed are invaluable!” Participant

“Brilliant and inspiring. Instilled a sense of hope and possibility.” Participant

Stronger Smarter Leadership Program

The Stronger Smarter Leadership Program aims to challenge and support school and community leaders in their pursuit of educational excellence for all students by providing learning opportunities to enhance their leadership capacity, challenge their assumptions and contribute to the critical mass of leaders creating positive changes in education. The Stronger Smarter Leadership Program equips school leaders to have challenging conversations with staff and actively engages the school community so that the whole school community has high expectations relationships and promotes positive identities and excellence in schools.



A key indicator for the program's success is principals and other leaders 'taking the message back to schools'; participants demonstrating leadership in a number of areas of school life. Evidence suggests that participants took the message back to schools, and had the hard conversations that led to changes in staff attitudes and beliefs. It was anticipated that changes in conversations, and staff having greater expectations of Indigenous students would in turn lead to students having greater expectations of themselves, and higher levels of self-esteem. The majority of respondents indicated that they felt that there had been positive changes to students' self-image, and gave moving examples of this. Respondents were also able to demonstrate that there had been significant positive changes to student engagement in all aspects of the school."

Clear Horizons Evaluation Report

Structure

Structure Participants are provided with a safe and supportive environment in which to explore these fundamental strategies. The program is an action research model, with a series of workshops and meetings throughout the year and includes:

- Face to face workshops facilitated by the Stronger Smarter team
- Personal challenges in which participants' explore their own beliefs and behaviours and specific leadership challenges to work on between each workshop session and
- Opportunities for participants to document and share their learning with others as participants are invited to join the Stronger Smarter network of more than 3000 educators.

Approaches to Learning

The facilitation and learning approaches are based on adult learning principles including:

- Drawing on participants' existing knowledge and experiences;
- Offering new learning frameworks and processes through which participants reflect on experiences;
- Multi-model delivery - visual, auditory and kinesthetic; and,
- Structuring the learning over a significant period of time so that new learning can be integrated.

Our Team



*Michal Purcell
Chief of Relationships*



*Cassie Ryan
Chief of Delivery*



*Ken Weatherall
Program Coordinator*

The Stronger Smarter Leadership Program honours difference and diversity. This is reflected in the composition of the facilitation team. The team has both male and female, Indigenous and non-Indigenous members, some with teaching backgrounds and others with other workplace and community experiences. All are experienced in the Stronger Smarter approach to co-facilitation and share a strong commitment to ensuring successful life outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

*“We must be determined that our classrooms are sacred spaces
in which our children can dream about being anything they want.”
Professor Chris Sarra, Founder/Chair, Stronger Smarter Institute*