

Life Ed: Four decades of helping kids stay happy and healthy

Most Australians who went to primary school in the past 40 years recognise Healthy Harold the giraffe. He's the educational mascot for Life Ed, one of Australia's most trusted charities with a proud legacy of forging a healthier future for generations of children.



For millions of Australians, the Life Ed program is a primary school rite of passage – a fun, engaging, and educational experience imparting indelible messages about making safer and healthier life choices.

With the mantra 'Every child deserves to thrive', Life Ed reaches around 700,000 students annually in 4000 schools and preschools across Australia – from remote communities in the Northern Territory and Doomadgee to city and regional areas in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, and Western Australia.

It's an incredible reach and impact for an organisation that grew out of one man's vision – the late Reverend Ted Noffs, who founded Life Education in 1979 at Sydney's Kings Cross Wayside Chapel after seeing the despair caused by illicit drug use.

Ted had a clear mission. He didn't want to frighten children with scare tactics. Instead, he wanted to spread the message that each child is unique – a true marvel in body, mind, and spirit. Through education, the program would motivate and empower children to make safer, healthier choices by drawing on their own knowledge.

While that core concept of self-empowerment remains at the heart of Life Ed, the not-for-profit has evolved into a contemporary, innovative and holistic program offering a suite of modules and resources supporting children, teachers and parents.

Kids still learn about healthy eating, safety, the human body, and the harms of drugs and alcohol – but there's now a bigger focus on social and emotional learning and resilience, reflecting the growing demand from schools for more help with issues like cybersafety, consent, puberty, respectful relationships, bullying, and anxiety.



Children engage with sessions in the familiar Life Ed mobile learning centres (vans) which visit schools, or experience the program in pop-up classrooms and regular classrooms, as well as via virtual and online lessons.

'We know that the biggest impact happens early in childhood,' says Life Ed Australia CEO Russell D'Costa.

'Children learn their core values at a young age. Tackling tomorrow's issues today leads to solutions to some of our biggest problems, such as chronic disease and mental illness.

'We teach children and young people aged 3–13, empowering them with the health, safety, and wellbeing skills to make better decisions throughout their lives, creating a holistic impact on their long-term health.'

Life Ed's program is backed by evidence and aligns with the Australian Curriculum and Key Frameworks. It's independently verified by external research and continuously tested on the ground by the program's 130 specialist educators.

Educators also measure their impact through the amazing feedback they regularly receive from teachers, parents and children about positive behaviour change.

From eating more fruit and vegetables and vowing not to do drugs, to managing online safety and developing strategies to combat bullying, children typically go home and tell their families what they discovered in the Life Ed session.

Program impact

Queensland's Benjamin Lagerberg, 10, is one of those kids. He was shocked to learn about the harmful impacts of smoking and vaping when his Year 5 class took part in *On the Case*, a Life Ed module exploring the history of tobacco and the effects of nicotine.

'What I took away from the Life Ed session was that there are 7000 chemicals produced when a cigarette is smoked,' Benjamin says. 'I would say before you get so addicted that you can't stop, just stop. Smoking is super bad for your health so just quit!'

Michael Fawsitt, who leads the Queensland affiliate of Life Ed, has been part of the program's innovation during 17 years as CEO.

He says powerful stories like this are common and inspire the team's ongoing work in schools.

'Ultimately, our goal as a program is to create lasting positive impact on young people,' Mr Fawsitt says.

'We regularly survey parents who tell us about their top concerns for their children – bullying, kids forming good friendships, cybersafety, and managing anxiety. After more than 40 years of working with schools to support their curriculum, we've developed a program that's not only fun and engaging but also gives children the knowledge and skills they need to cope with today's challenges.'

What many people don't realise is that Life Ed is a charity. Although each State affiliate receives some funding from government and community partners, the organisation relies on regular donors to support ongoing program development and the cost of delivery.

'It's never been easy running a charity, but Life Ed has such a proud legacy, and we believe the program is more needed than ever,' says Mr Fawsitt. 'Children remember the valuable lessons they learned with Life Ed when they were in primary school, and when they become parents, they want their children to have that Life Ed experience as well.'

'We want to be here in another 40 years – still relevant, still making an impact, and still helping children to live to their full potential. •

By donating to **Life Ed**, you're helping provide vital education programs to hundreds of thousands of Aussie kids every year.

Your support equips these children with essential life skills to keep them safe and healthy – now and into the future.

Donate now at www.lifeed.org.au



Life Ed works with children aged from 3 to 13.

Along with an Early Years Learning Program, there are 12 core primary school modules aligned to the Australian and State-based health and physical education learning curriculum which build on students' strengths and tackle a variety of topics including friendship, healthy foods, emotional and mental wellbeing, and body systems.

In Queensland, Victoria, and South Australia, Life Ed offers *Talk About It* – an innovative puberty, sexual health, and relationships program for students in upper primary grades. *Talk About It* is also offered to some high school students.

Life Ed Australia recently launched *Guide to Thrive*, an Australian-first production of resources for teachers, students, parents, and caregivers that helps Year 6 students make the transition to high school.

Life Ed Queensland delivers the award-winning *Healthy Eats* Program, which works closely with schools in key regions to improve tuckshop menus and nutritional awareness as well as boost primary school children's fruit and vegetable consumption.