Media Release
Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

Thursday, 22 June 2017

Children and families to benefit from grant to extend Underwood Centre program to North-West

At least 500 students on the North-West Coast will benefit from a $350,000 Tasmanian Community Fund grant to the University of Tasmania Foundation.

The grant will extend the Peter Underwood Centre’s Children’s University to 10 schools in the North-West during the next three years. The children will benefit from engaging in more than 46,000 hours of voluntary extracurricular learning at 50 Learning Destinations in their communities and more than 100 Learning Destinations statewide.

Advancement Office Executive Director Young Dawkins said: “This is a very powerful investment by the Tasmanian Community Fund, allowing us to extend this program in the North-West.

Underwood Centre Deputy Director Dr Becky Shelley said early evaluation of the work of the Children’s University showed clear benefits.

“Children’s University raises aspirations and self-belief, fosters curiosity and a love of learning, boosts achievement, broadens horizons and improves life chances,” she said.

Children’s University Tasmania was launched in July 2015 with 14 schools and 280 students across the state participating in 8500 hours of voluntary extracurricular learning so far. Participating students report a greater sense of achievement and an intention to continue with their education.

This is consistent with research in the United Kingdom, where the program originated, which found that achievement levels are significantly better among children who participate in Children’s University than for those who do not.

Dr Shelley said membership of Children’s University inspires a love of learning, strengthens parent-child engagement and family and community connectedness.

“The model is child-led, voluntary and fun,” she said. “There is a great potential in the North-West for Children’s University to make a difference in the lives of young people
and their families, increasing the engagement with learning, their communities and the University.”

Children’s University Tasmania operates under the auspices of Children’s University Australia at the University of Adelaide and is delivered through the Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment at the University of Tasmania.

Children’s University Tasmania creates meaningful partnerships between local businesses, service clubs, museums, libraries and galleries as well as community groups, schools and the University of Tasmania to provide quality extracurricular learning opportunities for children.

Through Children’s University, young people aged 7 to 14 years participate in a wide range of learning experiences at validated Learning Destinations, tracking their efforts in Passports to Learning. Their achievements are celebrated at annual graduation ceremonies, where they lead the University of Tasmania Town and Gown processions in December.

The Tasmanian Community Fund is an independent Fund that supports and strengthens Tasmanian communities by distributing funds to those communities.

The 10 participating schools are: East Devonport Primary, Hillcrest Primary, Miandetta Primary, Spreyton Primary, Reece High, Devonport High, Wilmot Primary, Montello Primary, Romaine Park Primary and Parklands High. A large number of community partners in the North-West have offered in-kind support.

Montello Primary School Principal Denise Wotherspoon said the opportunity to be involved in Children’s University was a wonderful result for children at the school.

“It is that opportunity to be recognised for out-of-school activities – a myriad of things that keep them active and healthy and engaged in the community,” she said.

“It combines so well with the Australian curriculum and plants the seed (of university) in their minds. The whole concept is amazing.”

Launched in February 2015, the Peter Underwood Centre is a partnership between the University of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Government through the Department of Education in association with the Office of the Governor of Tasmania.

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