



Home Education WA (HEWA)

Submission to the Youth Action Plan

About HEWA

[Home Education Western Australia](#) (HEWA)¹ is WA's **peak body for home-educating² families**. Established in 1994, we have been supporting the home-educating community for **30 years**. We are a not-for-profit, community-based and volunteer-run organisation.

Our purpose is to provide **quality information and resources**, opportunities to **connect**, and **advocacy** when needed for **all home-educating families across the state**. We have paid membership of over 200 families and a reach of nearly 3,000 through our newsletters and social media channels. We are considered the **go to place** for trusted, accurate information on home-education in WA.

Some of the **supports and activities** we provide the community include:

- A comprehensive [website](#) signposting families to home-education information and supports
- An **annual teen ball** for home-educated young people aged 13 to 18
- An annual **year 6 graduation event** for young people finishing year 6
- LEAP educational **incursions and excursions**
- [Workshops for adults](#) on topics such as 'Getting Started with Home-Education' and 'Understanding the Curriculum, Planning and Reporting.'
- Monthly **online drop-in sessions** to chat to a HEWA volunteer
- Group buy **discounts to educational programs** such as Maths Online, Skwirk, ArtVenture
- **Individual support for families** who may be experiencing challenges

Why HEWA is making a submission

HEWA is making a submission to the development of the Youth Action Plan because home-educated young people and their families are **rarely engaged with** by the State Government. When consultation with young people is delivered, 'schools' are the go-to

¹ Formerly titled Home-Based Learning Network

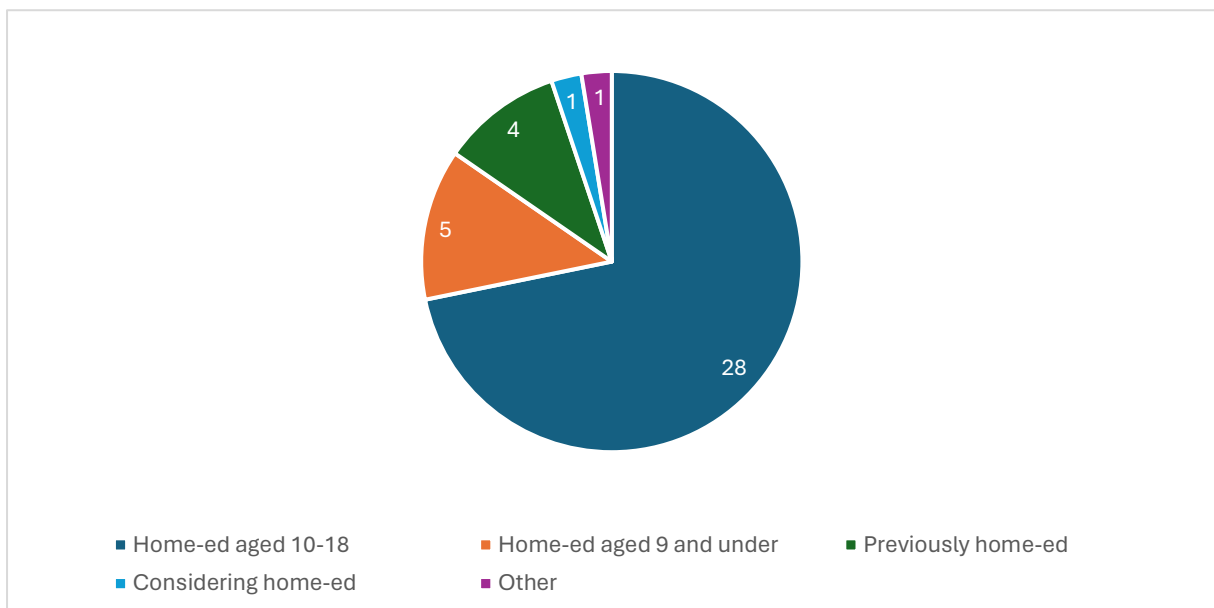
² The terms home education and homeschooling are used interchangeably in this submission, but mean the same thing

place and home-educated young people typically miss out. In addition, home-educated young people have unique lived experiences and face specific challenges that are different from many other young people, and they **deserve to be understood and considered** when the Department of Communities (Communities) is writing the new Plan.

Who we heard from

HEWA has a strong understanding of the needs our home-educating community, however, to support this submission we also delivered a **short survey** with our community. We heard from **39 families** via this survey. Nearly three-quarters of respondents were currently home-educating young people aged 10 to 18. A small proportion had young younger children or were previously home-educating their children—see **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: Survey respondents home-education status



The majority of survey respondents were from the **Perth metropolitan area** (82%) and 10% were from the Peel region. One was from the Mid-West and one from the South West and one selected other. The vast majority of home-educating families live in the Perth metropolitan area, however there are higher proportions of home-educating families in some areas of the South West and Great Southern, such as around the Margaret River area and Denmark area.

About home-educated young people

Home-educated young people make up a small, but **rapidly growing** proportion student base. The Department of Education provide limited public information around home-education statistics; however we do know that the numbers over the last **five years**

have shown a 58% increase—see **Table 1**³. Numbers were increasing at around 10% per annum before the COVID-19 pandemic, but this event saw a jump in numbers which has been maintained. This information is taken from the Department of Education’s [annual report for 2022/2023](#). The rate of increase is similar to other states in Australia who have also seen similar patterns over the few years.

Table 1: Number of registered home-educated students from 2019 to 2023⁴

2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
3,720	4,116	4,562	6,151	6,466

Whilst the Department of Education does not collect information on why families are home-educating; HEWA has a good understanding of the **driving forces**. We know that main reasons for people to choose home-educate include:

- Young person has a **disability or additional needs** that are not able to be well-met at school
- Young person is not attending school through ‘**school can’t**’
- Young person is experiencing **mental health difficulties** such as anxiety or depression which make attending school difficult
- Young person has experienced **bullying** at school
- Parents/caregivers want a **tailored education** or different style of education from what the child would receive in school
- Parents/caregivers are **dissatisfied with the education** that their child received at school, i.e., they are not learning, they are unhappy with the content
- Parents/caregivers are **long-term travelling** either within WA or around Australia
- Parents/caregivers have **religious or other beliefs** that mean they want to home-educate

A significant reason for the **increase in numbers** over last few years has been young people experiencing ‘school can’t’ which is often tied up with a young person’s **mental health and/or disability** or with school being **unable to meet their needs** or being **unwilling to make accommodations**. In some instances, the young person has been through many school options and/or experienced **significant trauma** in the school environment.

In recent years, HEWA has seen a **significant change in the home-education community** in that there are many more parents/caregivers currently home-educating who **never intended to** do so but have been pushed into this situation in the **best**

³ These numbers are all registered home-educated young people from pre-primary to year 12 as the Department of Education does not provide a breakdown of information by age or year group.

⁴ These figures do not include any young people who are not formally registered for home education. It also does not include young people who were previously home educated by now have a Notice of Arrangement (NOA), i.e., they have moved onto full-time TAFE, early university or in a traineeship or full-time work.

interests of their child. This cohort have higher support needs both from the home-educating community and HEWA as they often begin home-educating in stress and crisis.

In the survey, we asked families if any of the children and young people that were being homeschooled had a **disability, mental health condition or chronic illness**—67% of them said yes. For those that had responded yes, we asked them to tell us a little more. The most common responses were that their child had diagnosis of **Autism, PDA⁵, ADHD or anxiety.**⁶

Youth Action Plan

HEWA understands that the Youth Action Plan is focused on **universal youth services** that support the focus of the youth portfolio in **Table 2.**

Table 2: Communities youth portfolio focus areas

Youth development	Supporting young people to attain life skills, develop the knowledge and confidence needed to be involved in community life, achieve their goals and to respond to issues impacting their lives.
Youth engagement	Providing opportunities for young people to be involved in decisions that affect them across all levels of government and the community
Positive promotion of young people	Valuing young people for who they are and recognise the positive contributions they are making in the community.
Advocating on behalf of the needs of young people	Raising awareness of the needs of young people. This includes ensuring the needs of young people are fully understood and considered in decision making

We also understand that the intention for the Youth Action Plan is for this to be a **whole of Government approach**, and therefore may contain actions may sit within portfolio areas are outside of the Communities remit, such as the Department of Education.

HEWA has focused our submission on **tangible actions** that we believe are within the scope of State Government to achieve in the next three years, or **low-hanging fruit.** We believe that these actions would make a **significant difference to the health and wellbeing of home-educated young people** and their families.

We want to emphasis that it is **our strongly held and informed opinion** that home-educating families are mostly happy with the level of engagement with Department of Education. Home-educating **families in WA are skilled and competent at meeting the**

⁵ PDA stands for Pathological Demand Avoidance, and is most often seen in young people with an Autism Diagnosis

⁶ Many children and young people had many diagnoses

educational needs of their children and want to **maintain the flexibility** to address the *sometimes* complex needs of their children in the way that suits their child best. This submission **does not recommend more oversight** in way that the Department oversees home-education provision.

Discounts and free access

In the survey, we asked families to tell us about the impact of the **current cost of living crisis**. In total nearly half (47%) of the respondents agreed (21% strongly agreed and 26% agreed) that the cost of living was having an **impact on their ability to home educate their own children**. When we asked if they thought the cost of living crisis had *more impact* on home-educating families in general, this figure jumped to 71% agreeing that it did (45% strongly agreeing and 26% agreeing).

When a family chooses to home-educate their child there is **no funding available** to support them in this role. Home-education doesn't necessarily cost a lot of money, but inevitably there are things that parents/caregivers do spend money on such as stationary, printers, work or text books, manipulatives, classes and tutors, online programs and so on, with **costs often increasing as the child gets older**. The biggest financial cost to families is typically one parent either ceasing work or dropping hours/shifts to home-educate their child, especially if they are of primary school age. In addition, as many families home-educate children with disabilities or mental health challenges, they often incur **significant costs associated with medical or therapy appointments**. Some families are able to access the NDIS, but many are not, i.e. if they are on a waiting list for a diagnosis or have a diagnosis that doesn't attract NDIS funding, such as ADHD, anxiety etc.

A lot of the 'home education' is done **out in the community** with homeschoolers visiting places like **libraries, museums, galleries, science providers** and so on. Some local government authorities are doing excellent work in this space often providing free activities and even setting up homeschooling youth groups with youth workers⁷. However, the State Government don't provide anything in this space. Whilst **school groups can often access significant discounts for excursions/incursions** and low cost or free places for teachers, this is harder for home-educating parents to access. Not only do parents have to pull together a group to access discounts and take the financial risk of managing that money from many families, but many have children with disabilities who can't access group activities and would benefit from attending a venue with just their immediate family. When this is the case, it becomes quite **unaffordable for individual families** and many home-educated young people miss out. Where parents do have the ability to organise a group for an incursion, they sometimes struggle find a venue, as they don't have insurance.

⁷ At the time of writing, the City of Cockburn and the City of Belmont delivered free homeschool groups for teens during term time, supported by youth workers in their respective youth centres.

In the survey, 87% of families said that they felt the State Government should provide discounts/free access to State run educational facilities (i.e. museums, special art exhibits)".

"Treat all students the same whether they are home schooled or public"

Providing greater access to State run educational facilities would support the focus area of the youth portfolio of **supporting young people to attain life skills, develop the knowledge and confidence needed to be involved in community life, achieve their goals and to respond to issues impacting their lives.**

Recommendation 1: Review educational options⁸ provided by the State Government such as entry fees to Boola Bardip, entry fees to special exhibitions, art gallery exhibitions, and other State-funded programs and look to provide free entry (ideal) or at a minimum free entry for the educator (parent/caregiver) upon citing the young person's home-education registration certificate.

Access to opportunities

In many ways, home-educated young people have good access to opportunities, as they are out and about in the community. However there are **some opportunities that are more difficult to access** as home-educated young people 'as a cohort' often just haven't been considered. Sometimes when a proactive parent enquiries further or HEWA contacts the relevant Department, we are advised that homeschoolers are also eligible, but this is ad-hoc. Generally things are **not promoted to home-educating families or young people directly.**

Two recent examples are:

1. The [Premier's Anzac Student Tour](#) which is travelling to Japan in 2025. This was recently promoted through the [Public Education in WA](#) Facebook page. The link stated that all students years 8 to 11 in a public or non-government school were eligible. There was no information about home-educated students. Upon enquiry on the Facebook page, HEWA was advised that home-educated students were welcome to apply but the application process was different, so a program coordinator would need to be contacted. HEWA was then able to share this information with home-educating families, but it would be better if home-educated students were included at the outset and in all the communication materials.
2. In December, the State Government announced that they were making school camps on Rottnest Island more accessible and affordable for WA students, with schools in lower socio-economic areas eligible for this discount. As outlined

⁸ The State Government can look at AQWA who has a good model of providing a free ticket for the parent as educator for entry to the facility term time: <https://www.aqwa.com.au/excursions/homeschooling-students-educators/>

above, many home-educating families are often significantly financially disadvantaged by home-educating and would also benefit from initiatives such as this. There were many comments on Rita Saffioti's page from home-educating families asking if they could access this discount with no response.

In the survey we conducted, **79% of families said that they thought the State Government should provide more initiatives** offered to schools.

"My child participated in a local council project as a homeschooler, and we have been to Canberra under PACER, but haven't seen any state govt opportunities"

"Government Departments almost never mention or include homeschoolers in things that they do"

We additionally believe that the State Government should look at ways that they can **communicate opportunities of offer to home-educated students**. The mechanism most likely to achieve this would be through HEWA, as we have direct connection with thousands of home-educating families through direct email and social media. Another avenue would be via the district education offices to communicate directly with families that are registered for home education. We believe the latter to be a less effective method as the district office's generally don't send out anything beyond an annual beginning of year letter to families. Even during the COVID pandemic, there was no communication by the home-education offices about any changes to moderation visits or any support provided at all.

"I feel we are a forgotten community. School does not work for the majority of home ed kids. This shouldn't mean we are left out of the support systems"

"We are like the forgotten swept under the rug"

Again ensuring opportunities are opened up to home-educated young people and families are adequately informed of these opportunities would achieve the focus area in the youth portfolio of **supporting young people to attain life skills, develop the knowledge and confidence needed to be involved in community life, achieve their goals and to respond to issues impacting their lives**.

Recommendation 2: Every opportunity that is promoted for young people of school age, and especially those that relates to education should have an option for how homeschoolers can be involved.

Recommendation 3: State Government department's should utilise HEWA's communication channels and/or those through the District Education Offices to share opportunities with home-educating families

Engaging with home-educated young people

In the survey we asked families to tell us if they thought the State Government actively sought the **voice, thoughts and opinions of home-educated students**. Not one family said yes. In total, **82% said no**, 15% said they were unsure and one person chose 'other'.

It is HEWA's experience is that **no State Government department** has ever reached out to our organisation to **connect and consult with home-educated students**. For example, in the development of this Youth Action Plan, there has been many engagements run in schools, but the team made no contact with HEWA or homeschoolers in general to be part of this work. It is our experience that **HEWA has to strongly advocate for home-educated students to be considered** in most instances. For example the Commissioner for Children and Young People have delivered their Speaking Out survey over a number of years, always in schools. It took 18 months' worth of advocacy by HEWA for home-educated students to be considered as part of this work.⁹

There are **no home-educated students currently sitting on the [WA Student Council](#)**. HEWA has never been asked to promote the Ministerial Youth Advisory Council (MYAC) so as to encourage home-educated students apply. The State Government has recently announced a review of the School Education Act with a focus on disability and HEWA was not approached to be part of this.¹⁰

Currently the State Government is **not achieving** the focus area of the youth portfolio of **youth engagement: providing opportunities for young people to be involved in decisions that affect them across all levels of government and the community** as it relates to home-educated students.

“Recognise that the voice of home educated students are just valuable as any other student”

This is especially disappointing given the **significant needs of home-educated students** and the different lived experiences many have had. As outlined above, a high proportion of this cohort have a disability, and many have had negative experiences in the school environment. The State Government are additionally not achieving their focus area within the youth portfolio as it relates to home-educated young people of **advocacy on behalf of the needs of young people by raising awareness of the needs of young people, including ensuring the needs of young people are fully understood and considered in decision making**.

⁹ This did finally occur in 2021, with the report located [here](#).

¹⁰ HEWA has since contacted the Manager overseeing the review of this and will likely be working with them during the consultation phase to help consult with families and young people given the very high proportion of young people with disabilities that are home-educating.

“Seek greater input from home educated students and their parents to decisions that would impact those families.”

“Actively seek the voice, thoughts and opinions of home-education students and recognise there is a variety of reasons/contexts why people home-educate and the real life consequences on parents, siblings and extended family.”

Recommendation 4: When delivering consultation and engagement with young people, State Government department’s should ensure that home-educated students are added as a group that require inclusion.

Recommendation 5: Any reference group opportunities that focus on young people, especially if they have an education or disability focus, should include home-educated student representation.

Resources for home-educated students

There are three practical things that HEWA would like to see the State Government explore for home-educated students that would make a real difference in their ability to ***attain life skills, develop the knowledge and confidence needed to be involved in community life, achieve their goals and to respond to issues impacting their lives***—a focus area of the youth portfolio.

1. **Work experience insurance.** Currently, WA school students are able to do work experience as insurance for this is provided by their school. In WA, the Department of Education does not provide insurance for home-educated students to do work experience, so either the young person’s parent has to make private arrangements (which is very inaccessible) or the student misses out. Home-educated students in both Queensland and Tasmania can get government work experience insurance through their respective Departments of Education. The inability of WA home-educated students to do work experience can impact them achieving their goals.
2. **Student ID cards.** Currently, WA home-educated students do not have a student identification card. This impacts their easy access to discounts that students get. It also means that they have less ID than young people in school have. In addition, a student ID which indicates that they are home-educated would help students in the later high school years with independently moving through their community, i.e. in shopping centres where they sometimes get refused service during school hours¹¹ or in other places in the community.

¹¹ There is not a strong understanding in the community that home-educated students do not have to be studying 9am to 3pm Monday to Friday during term time, and often do their learning at different times of the day or on weekends or in the school holidays.

3. **Education email address.** There are many things in the community that can be accessed by students who have a school based @edu.au address that can't be accessed by home-educated students. HEWA has the ability to provide an @edu.au address however it does not have the same access that a Government issued one does. For example, most families are unable to access Microsoft Office student discount, or Canva education amongst other things. In addition, getting an @edu.au address through HEWA is only for members. We believe all families should be able to access an @edu.au address as they are registered with the Department for home education.

Recommendation 6: Explore the provision of work experience insurance for home-educated families by connecting with the Queensland Department of Education and the Tasmanian Department of Education

Recommendation 7: Start issuing student ID cards for all registered home-educated students (if desired by the family)

Recommendation 8: Explore the provision of an @edu.au address for all home-educated students (if desired by the family)

Resourcing for Home Education WA (HEWA)

HEWA has existed for 30 years and are one of only two State bodies representing home-educators in Australia.¹² We hear time and time again that what we do is invaluable, and we have seen a **huge increase in the need for our support** as homeschooling rates have risen in WA. There are a number of social media pages which support homeschoolers, but the advice given through those can be variable. HEWA helps ensure that **accurate information about a parents rights and responsibilities** is given. We also provide a consistent way for home-educating students to access important 'rights of passage' events such as balls and graduations.

HEWA receives no funding from any Government Department. We **rely solely on membership income** from individual families. Membership to bodies like HEWA is often the first thing that gets dropped from a budget when times are hard, and we are currently in a cost of living crisis. As we receive no funding, our organisation is **solely run by volunteers** who are all homeschooling parents/caregiver's themselves. This limits the support that we are able to give. In addition, the support given by the Department of Education to home-educating families is very limited. For most people, they receive one visit a year from their moderator, and their role is not to link individuals in with opportunities and resources. As outlined above, the communication by the Department of Education is restricted to one letter at the beginning of the year.¹³

¹² The other is Home Education Network (HEN) in Victoria which supports home-educating families in Victoria

¹³ Many home education families report that they don't actually receive that as it's now emailed instead of posted

Even though we are not an 'education provider' and focus much more on activities, events, support and advocacy, HWEA is rarely eligible for funding through organisations such as Lotterywest as they see anything 'education related' as a State Government responsibility.

In the survey we asked families if they support **HEWA advocating for funding for our organisation**. In total, **92% said yes**, 5% were unsure and one person said no. We asked families to tell us a bit more about their answer and received overwhelming support. A small sample of these comments are included below:

"Absolutely it's a vital service. It's a daunting and somewhat lonely journey that a home educator is on. Often the child has been through school trauma. The child and the parent(s) are burnt out. Access to support services is vital. In a world of so much information having a WA based support organization is essential."

"It is important for home education into the future that representative bodies are sustainable and able to strongly advocate for home education and home educating families. Many teacher professional associations receive government funding or incentives, so why not HEWA"

"HEWA provides a very valuable service"

"HEWA has years of experience on the ground with home educating families and organisations that support families to educate their children. They have an already established communication network to inform and help. Committee members are passionate in the area of education, for all students. I don't see them applying pressure on families in any particular way of educating - their communications are measured, informative and inclusive. I see a great opportunity for them to work collaboratively with the State government"

"Provided that they offer help to any homeschool family who need it and not just members. Again membership is out of reach for many families."

"It's an absolutely vital organisation that supports the homeschooling community and helps facilitate communication and understanding between home schoolers and govt. funding would help expand their services so that families who can't afford the membership could also access resources."

Recommendation 9: Explore State Government funding for Home Education WA (HEWA) so that they can more sustainably support home-educating families in WA.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we believe that we have **outlined a range of tangible and achievable actions** that the State Government can take to ensure that home-educated young people's voices can be better included in planning and outlined practical supports that can be provided to help them achieve their goals.

In the survey, we asked families to **tell us the one thing** that they want to tell the State Government youth team. The main theme was that the **option to home-educate was absolutely vital for their young people**. Many said it saved the health and wellbeing of their child and providing for their education and future in a way that was never going to happen if they had remained in school.

Many wanted there to be more **understanding of home-education as a valid and successful method of education** and more consideration given to the needs of the home-educating community at a State Government level. Some of the comments from home-educating families have been included below:

“Our children are receiving an incredibly rich education through home schooling, but this comes at a higher cost for families. We are doing the job that many of us felt was not being done sufficiently in schools, and we’re doing it whilst working other jobs and juggling other responsibilities. Our children should have equal access to services and resources, as well as a body that advocates for their rights and opportunities.”

“Trust young people - they are more capable, and know themselves better, and at an earlier age, than you think. Give them the ability to make choices about their education and life pathways from an earlier age and support them in doing so.”

“The youth are our future, and the education department is failing them. Parents make the choice to home school so their children can receive an education in a non-cookie cutter way. The home schooling community is growing and this needs to be acknowledged and supported by the State Government.”

“There needs to be more flexibility in the way education is viewed in WA: I feel that it's not helpful for any kids who are different.”

“All Youth are important and should have access to every opportunity we can give them.”

“The existing education system (at all tiers) cannot accommodate students outside the statistical bell curve with the provided resources; as such families who choose to home educate are providing overall effective

education to a population that would otherwise never reach even close to their potential and become contributing societal members.”

“Learn more about why home-education is such an effective education model for so many children and young people”

Next steps

The HEWA Committee thanks you for **your consideration of this submission**. If you would like to find out more about home-education in WA, or anything contained in this submission, you can contact coordinator@hbln.org.au, pres@hbln.org.au or comm02@hbln.org.au