

THE BASICS – CHANNEL LAUNCH
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
DRU POINT PLAYGROUND, MARGATE, TUESDAY 10 DECEMBER 2019

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community, who have survived invasion and dispossession, and continue to maintain their identity, culture and Indigenous rights.

In acknowledging the traditional and original owners of the land here in the Channel, there is much to lament. Not so far from here, in 1847 at putalina, Oyster Cove, 47 Tasmanian Aboriginal people, the survivors of those who had been incarcerated for 15 years at Wybalenna on Flinders Island, were forced to take up residency in an ex-convict station that had been closed because of its dilapidated condition. By 1874, only Truganini remained and the site was abandoned. Fortunately, in a remarkable act of resilience, a remnant of the Aboriginal people survived on the Bass Strait Islands and through their descendants and those of Fanny Cochrane, who was permitted to leave Oyster Cove and marry, today we have a thriving indigenous community in Tasmania and Tasmania is enriched by their contribution. Last Saturday, on Mannalargenna Day at tebrakunna, Cape Portland, I participated in a day which symbolised the continuity and the revival of that culture.

Thank you to Kate Slater and Maree Thompson for inviting me to launch the Basics, here in the Channel. I have been captivated by the concept of the Boston Basics since Natalie Brown, the Director of the Underwood Centre, first told me about it after she had met with Bill Jarvis who, like Kate and Maree, had learnt about it when studying at Harvard. The Basics engage with the knowledge that 80 percent of brain development occurs from birth to the age of three and that these are vital years for stimulating brain development. We know that not all children have been exposed to the same opportunities to develop their cognitive and emotional development. A seminal US study by Betty Hart and Todd Risley found that in the first three years of life, some children heard 30 million more words than others, an advantage that translated by third grade into bigger vocabularies, better reading scores and higher test scores.¹

¹ Also quoted by Cates, n 1.

The Basics, as I understand it, aims to make sure we take advantage of those early years by ensuring parents, grandparents, care givers and the whole community including local businesses embrace five simple and basic principles to stimulate and encourage a child's early brain development. We need everyone to be aware that even though babies are not yet talking, this does not mean they are not learning.

So, the Basics are evidence-based care-giving principles which encompass what experts find to be important from birth. They are: Maximise love and manage stress; Talk, sing and point; Count, group and compare; Explore through movement and play; Read and discuss stories.

What is so attractive about the Basics is that it is a grass-roots initiative – that it seeks to engage the whole community in the project. We hear a lot about our education system, mostly in terms of criticisms of it, falling standards, according to PISA results and, in Tasmania, low levels of year 12 completion and a low proportion of adults with a Bachelor degree or higher; a lack of skilled workers; the fact that 47% of our adult population is functionally illiterate.

So often the solutions are said to lie with the government, calls to increase government expenditure on education, reduce class sizes, improve teaching, curriculum change and so on. The Basics takes a different approach with local communities taking responsibility and embracing an education campaign to help us all understand what families and communities can do to prepare our children for lifelong learning. I would like to congratulate Kate and Maree for their initiative in bringing the Basics to the Channel, and the Kingborough Council, the schools, businesses and the steering committee who have supported this project. It is such a wonderful, promising concept which I am keen to support in whatever way I can.

Thank you.