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### **Letter of support for Alithia Learning**

I write this letter as a statement of support for the activities currently undertaken, as well as proposed for the future, by Alithia Learning. My interest lies as a parent of two children who experienced education opportunities outside the mainstream system by attending a Steiner school for many years, and also as an advocate for community enrichment in my role as a Councillor on Coffs Harbour City Council.

While in Australia there are many positive aspects to our public education system as well as many thousands of talented and dedicated teachers, I believe that the system is constrained by some principles of education which will always exclude some children from thriving within it. An example of this is testing and grading. For children who excel or are competent in returning received information, this can be encouraging. Conversely, children who are not will be discouraged and labelled as non-performing and when these labels begin from infant school, the impacts on the human are extremely deleterious in my view. An approach which removed this early labelling and sorting will allow greater flourishing for more children.

I find another major gap in mainstream education is the lack of focus on the child as a human in part of society. The encouragement of each person to fulfill their emotional, spiritual, artistic potential is a foundation for a better society. Some of the literature relating to Steiner education refers to children opening up their true natures 'like the petals of a flower'. Being free to unfold in self-discovery in a nurturing environment which encourages inclusiveness as well as individuality will allow for greater confidence and self-reliance. Thus, the spiritual aspects of 'what does it mean to be a person' is something which in my view should form an important part of childhood education and experience and equally, if not more important than academic learnings.

Another wonderful aspect for the Alithia model is nature-based play and outdoor learning. As humans, we need to recognize our part in the natural world and develop awe and respect for nature. To allow children to develop understanding and appreciation of ecosystems, seasonal changes, other life forms will connect them more closely to the world in which they live. To notice and feel the planetary rhythms and cycles of tides, day length etc I think connects us to a deeper spiritual understanding of who we may be in a universe.

I think that children learn in very many ways and there is no one method which fits all. But I believe that there are foundational principles which should form part of all early childhood learning experiences. Such things as parent involvement, space for exploration, physical movement, music and art, as well as compassion, care and inclusivity being modelled behaviours will contribute to healthy happy adults of the future.

I believe that the model set by Alithia will be an outstanding way for parents and educators to guide children towards fulfillment and learning in a safe and supported environment. I believe that the learning style will not only benefit children, but allow the participating adults to grow in their own journeys. All of this will promote a more cohesive and compassionate society.

I wish Alithia learning every success and will follow its development with keen interest. I am happy to further discuss any aspect of this statement.

Sincerely,

Dr Sally Townley

Councillor, Coffs Harbour City Council

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