For the University of Adelaide, the opportunity to introduce the innovative Children’s University model to Australia couldn’t have come at a better time.

Spurred by evidence that early intervention increases children’s engagement with learning and education, the University of Adelaide had been searching for a comprehensive mechanism to promote learning to Australian children, particularly those from rural and remote locations, Indigenous communities and disadvantaged backgrounds. It was also looking to build on the successes of its curriculum-based outreach program called *Adelaide Compass* *- Find your way to Higher Education* to primary schools across the state.

It was in 2011 that the University first came across the UK-based Children’s University program and its innovative approach to promote social mobility by providing high quality and exciting learning activities and experiences outside normal school hours to children aged 7 to 14. The Children’s University promotion of a love of learning along with its involvement of parents and the wider community complements the University of Adelaide’s vision to lay the foundations for children’s aspiration to higher education. The University of Adelaide sees Children’s University as a vehicle to continue its position as a leader and contributor to the learning community of South Australia and the nation more broadly.

In August 2013, the University of Adelaide became the sole licence holder and lead organisation to introduce the Children’s University in Australia, with the intention of extending to the Australasian region.

Children from across Australia’s geographical expanse – whether in urban, regional or remote locations - will now be given the opportunity to benefit from a coordinated system of learning activities that instils the importance (and fun) of learning that presents higher education as a viable option.

The University of Adelaide is excited about this new venture, supported by the knowledge that involvement in Children’s University by students in the UK is proven to increase engagement in all forms of ‘learning experiences’ and increase attendance at and achievement in school. Now it’s Australia’s turn to benefit.

Although Children’s University is open to all children, it has a strong focus on those at educational or socio-economic disadvantage. In South Australia alone, there are over 700 schools and 180,000 students that would be eligible to participate in the Children’s University. Approximately 28% of these schools are considered to be disadvantaged. Some of these students may not have any family members who have attended university, and for them higher education may not be seen as attainable or even an option. The Children’s University in Australia will provide valuable opportunities to access role models, explore a multitude of Learning Destinations and form a different view of education and learning. This will enable children to formulate aspirations that include higher education and lead to self-actualisation.

The University of Adelaide’s Vice Chancellor, Professor Warren Bebbington, believes supporting students to overcome the barriers to Higher Education is of real importance. A lack of family background in higher education meant his path to university was never going to be straightforward. “My father left school when he was 14.” Professor Bebbington’s vision, now encapsulated in the University’s strategic plan, ‘Beacon of Enlightenment’, revisits and builds upon the University’s founding principles including the key strategic goal of reaching out to a broader student body, especially students from low socio-economic status, whilst promoting the importance of the University to the community.

Kiri Hagenus Director of the Office for Future Students at the University of Adelaide believes this initiative is one that will be embraced by Australian communities. “There are quite a lot of programs that try to address the issues of disadvantaged children engaging with their communities in a safe and experiential manner. Unfortunately, most are led and developed by adults who have great intentions but do not think like children. The beauty of Children’s University is that the children lead the way. Learning is based on their interests and, of course, what’s fun. Children don’t have to be involved they *choose* to be involved.”

Not only will Australian children benefit from the Children’s University, but the University of Adelaide knows the importance of the initiative for its own student cohort. University of Adelaide students will have the opportunity to be involved in running learning activities that will develop their graduate career readiness in a practical way. These volunteering opportunities will be a point of difference with other universities and will add value to the learning experience.

The University will officially launch Children’s University Australia in November 2013 when our first graduands walk through Bonython Hall to collect their parchments from the Deputy Vice Chancellor and Vice President Academic, Pascale Quester in front of parents, teachers, friends, the Vice Chancellor Professor Bebbington and special guests. It will be a truly exciting day and a great chance to celebrate and be inspired by the achievements of these children.