

Inclusive Approaches with Young People

Stories from around Australia

Compiled and edited by Michael Kimberley

AUSTRALIAN YOUTH RESEARCH CENTRE



Stories from around Australia



FOUNDATION FOR
Young Australians

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Thank you also to everyone who responded to the call-out for Expressions of Interest, to the survey, and to the many hundreds of phone calls around the country that have gone into compiling this publication. Thanks to Roger Holdsworth for your countless hours critically reviewing each draft and thanks to Helen Stokes for your supervision and support.

Fiona Taylor and Mike Kimberley

A Word About Process

The format and themes of this project were determined through an initial research phase carried out by the Australian Youth Research Centre.

The youth sector was invited to participate in this research in a call-out made through the Youth Affairs Councils and Offices for Youth (or their equivalents) in each state or territory. This linked the respondents to an on-line survey. Information about the project was also circulated through email lists, and hubs for local councils and NGOs were asked to disseminate the survey location to youth practitioners within their organisations. During March and April 2007, 162 youth sector practitioners completed the on-line survey.

The survey asked about the criteria that respondents used for determining good practice (or 'what works'), the best formats for effective information transferral, and possible topics of interest: what people wanted to read about. The responses were compiled and analysed, and decisions were made about the first themes and topics based on responses.

Further and more specific information was then sought about possible examples that could be included in each publication. This second call out for 'Expressions of Interest' was circulated nationally in April and May 2007. Projects were invited to self-nominate or to nominate other projects for each of the three publications.

Over 300 expressions of interest were received. Each of these was then considered in light of the good practice principles (that are described in the introduction to each publication). It was additionally decided that each publication needed to provide a **range** of useful stories for other practitioners or active young people, and to document and celebrate practice from a wide variety of geographic and socio-economic settings.

The short-listed projects were further investigated through internet research, introductory phone interviews with the projects and by seeking a word-of-mouth references from state-based peak bodies or local hub organisations. (Potentially competing local organisations were not asked for references, due to the potential for bias.) Whilst no process can be perfect, this sought to move beyond the rhetoric of project intentions to the reality of their achievements, based on the assumption that successful projects would have gained some degree of local acknowledgement.

The stories draw upon information provided late in 2007 and early in 2008. Inevitably, circumstances (including the ages of participants) change; practices develop and priorities alter. These glimpses of practice provide information about dynamic projects and processes.

Acronyms

ACYFS Aboriginal Child, Youth and Family Strategy

ADD or ADHD Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

ALW Australian Lebanese Welfare

ATSI Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

AYRC Australian Youth Research Centre

CLD or CALD Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

CMY Centre for Multicultural Youth (Vic)

CYMS Cairns Youth Mentoring Scheme (Qld)

DADAA Disability in the Arts, Disadvantage in the Arts, Australia (WA)

DOCS Department of Community Services (NSW)

FLO Flexible Learning Options

FNQ Far North Queensland

FYA The Foundation for Young Australians

GLBTIQ or GLBTI Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, (Queer)

GPA Grade Point Average

ICAN Innovative Community Action Network (SA)

IPU In-Patient Unit

JPET Job Placement, Employment and Training

JPSS John Pirie Secondary School, SA

LGA Local Government Area

MIEACT Mental Illness Education ACT

MRC Migrant Resource Centre

NAYSS Newly Arrived Youth Support Services

SACE South Australian Certificate of Education

SAPOL South Australian Police

SFYS School Focused Youth Services (Vic)

SSA or SSATY Same Sex Attracted (and Transgender Young People)

SSO School Support Officer

TAFE Technical and Further Education

UCW Uniting Care Wesley

VCA Victorian College for the Arts

YAT Youth Action Team

YET Youth Enterprise Trust (Qld)

Preface

The Foundation for Young Australians is proud of its long tradition of supporting innovative ideas, organisations and projects through which young people lead change and make a lasting and positive difference to the community.

The What Works series was commissioned by The Foundation for Young Australians with a dual purpose: to celebrate the achievements of youth-led organisations around the nation, and in doing so, to try to capture what works and what doesn't in their successful planning and delivery. This series offers guidance based upon the experiences of researchers, youth workers, teachers, community workers, local council members and, most importantly, the young people involved. Each report concludes with a table of key findings that connect broader findings to the specific case studies under review. These findings provide valuable points of reflection for those seeking to start up or further develop a youth-led organisation. But equally valuable are the authentic stories.

Based upon an international series published by the International Youth Foundation, these reports profile a total of 36 youth-led organisations working in community partnerships nationwide to tackle challenges ranging from disengagement from school, cross-cultural conflict, substance abuse, social exclusion, boredom and vandalism through to migrant settlement, racism and Australia's response to climate change. Already, their impact has been significant and their stories serve to inspire, inform and transform. We hope that you find these resources useful.

Our thanks go to Trish Burrows for supporting this research. We are particularly grateful to Fiona Taylor, Michael Kimberley and Senior Research Associate Roger Holdsworth of the Australian Youth Research Centre at The University of Melbourne, whose careful research has produced an illuminating resource that will prove invaluable to future partnerships in the youth sector.

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Inclusive Approaches With Young People

This is the third publication in the *What Works Australia* series, which aims to:

- » share good ideas;
- » celebrate and publicise successful projects from around Australia;
- » give participants a chance to reflect on their project and to share their reflections;
- » provide information, inspiration and advice to emerging practice;
- » document the nuts and bolts of getting a successful project off the ground; and
- » document the diversity of projects that are positively engaging young people.

The primary focus of this publication is to showcase projects that work with young people who are or have been variously excluded from access and success. It features project stories that have been drawn from the commentary and views of project leaders, coordinators, workers and young people. It emphasises 'what works' in organisations, programs and projects that adopt positive and inclusive approaches with young people.

The themes behind this project raised many crucial questions such as: How do we approach young people with a positive attitude whilst grappling with problematic terms such as 'at risk', 'marginalised', 'difficult', and 'hard to reach'?

A recent report to the Victorian State Government noted:

There are clear links between disadvantage and marginalisation and then to broader problems that threaten health, education, links with community and self-esteem. Disconnection from family, school, or community can often result in high risk behaviour or at least low self-esteem and lack of longer term aspirations. The literature recognises that simplistic notions of transition from childhood to adulthood or from dependence to independence can distort the reality and complexity of being 'young' in society. Experience, transition, attainment of independence are no longer simply linear in their association and the complexity of the impact of societal factors on the

experiences of young people means that no one issue and no one solution is applicable.

We are also mindful of recent literature alerting us to the problems associated with labelling or problematising young people and the trends towards preferred approaches like creating supportive environments that engage young people and the importance of recognising the connections, both positive and negative, between young people and their community.¹

While respondents to our survey of the youth sector conducted early in 2007 sought advice about and examples of success in working with young people at risk of marginalisation or disadvantage, they wanted to know about programs that have focused on aspects such as:

- » encouraging participation in programs for young people;
- » effectively engaging young people so they remain involved;
- » better access to services for young people;
- » improved access to and contact with community;
- » improving self-esteem; and
- » improving transition from risk to empowerment, from dependence to independence, from marginalisation to inclusion.

And it is these characteristics of projects that are highlighted here.

The programs featured here do not purport to have the solution for all young people with whom they have contact. However, they are working effectively, with conviction and with the benefit to young people foremost in their planning and actions. The core of the work undertaken by these programs is in tackling risk factors for young people and providing them with support and protective mechanisms. Most importantly, these programs seek to empower young people while they come to terms with these risks.

¹ Wierenga, A. and Wyn, J. (AYRC) and Glover, S. and Meade, M. (Centre for Adolescent Health, Royal Children's Hospital) (2003) Application of Enabling State Principles in the Delivery of Youth Services. Melbourne: Australian Youth Research Centre.

We talked with and recorded the comments of youth workers, young people, program leaders and coordinators and managers, teachers, students, parents and community members and gave them the opportunity to review draft material. The articles published here tell their stories and focus on how people involved in the programs think and feel about the work they do, the relationships they have through that work and the way their efforts contribute to improved well-being for the young people involved. They also focus on the responses of young people; while only a small group of voices may be represented here, these represent the strong sense of achievement and improved self-worth felt by most young people participating in these programs.

The material contained here is very much 'from the ground up' and this is appropriate. It reflects the common orientations of:

- » being focused locally;
- » dealing with the issues on a daily basis; and
- » valuing the people with whom you are working.

The work of these programs is of course undertaken from broader understandings of methodology and practice and, in many programs, within a context of self-evaluation or action research. Most of these approaches also benefit from the longevity of the programs, building on experience and evaluations and generating a strong sense of worth and value for the young people involved.

Mike Kimberley



Building Bridges: “Hanging Out in the North”

Centre for Multicultural Youth,
Melbourne

*Our dream is to build bridges
between different cultures*

See us now, hear us now

Ee-Ha-Yeah

We want to share this dream with you

Women together, strong and true.

The **Building Bridges** project brought together young women from diverse cultural backgrounds to identify issues, open dialogue and initiate change in their local community. Discrimination can be tackled by bringing affected groups together with members of the wider community to work on activities that are important to them all. Meaningful relationships can form, leading to better understanding between groups and helping to break down negative attitudes that lead to discrimination and exclusion.

The project was initiated by Melbourne’s Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY). The Centre was established

to assist refugee and migrant young people to settle successfully in Australia and participate fully in community life. CMY now has a reputation around Australia for excellence in the provision of services to multicultural youth and for leadership in advice to government and community agencies on the needs of these young people. Its mission is to influence both the social policy agenda and the social services network in Australia to ensure that young people from diverse cultural backgrounds have every opportunity to succeed in Australian society.

CMY operates on the basis of three guiding principles:

- » Human Rights;
- » Diversity; and
- » Participation.

There are four main service dimensions that seek to promote social change by combining policy development and direct service delivery within a community development framework. The service delivery we provide ensures that CMY retains its expertise, and hence leadership, in advocacy for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. CMY’s service types are:

1. Support for young people

CMY provides direct services to young people in locations around Melbourne that are selected because of the special needs of multicultural youth in those areas. Services include:

- » Youth mentoring;
- » Leadership training;
- » Life skills development and conflict resolution;
- » Individual and family counselling;
- » Sports and recreation programs; and
- » Engagement in arts and culture.

2. Sector development

CMY provides extensive support to community and government organisations (youth, multicultural and generalist) to assist them develop the knowledge and skills to support migrant and refugee young people. Capacity building and sector development services include:

- » Policy forums and regional network meetings;
- » Training for professionals working with young people;
- » Training for tertiary students likely to work with refugee and migrant young people in the future;
- » Secondary consultations to support service planning and program development; and
- » Ad hoc advice-on-request to workers and organisations.

3. Policy advice and advocacy

CMY disseminates a wide range of information to government and community agencies working with young people from diverse backgrounds. It also offers advice to State and Commonwealth agencies and committees and advocates on behalf of young people. Examples of work include:

- » A bi-monthly electronic newsletter with over 1500 subscribers;
- » A website with extensive information available for download;
- » Participation in a range of Government advisory committees;
- » Designated advisor status to both state and national governments; and
- » Policy discussion papers on key topics.

4. Research and development

CMY forms partnerships with key research institutes and universities to support major research projects about the settlement and community participation of young people from diverse backgrounds. It also develops innovative programs built on the basis of practice experience with young people. Examples include:

- » Youth Referral and Independent Persons Program for young people in the criminal justice system;
- » Refugee Education Partnership Program to support the additional learning needs of newly arrived young people; and
- » Newly Arrived Youth Support Services (NAYSS) national Lead Provider.

Building Bridges: A case study of CMY's approach to youth participation

As one of the many ways in which we facilitate support for young people, CMY was involved in an innovative 10-month youth participation project in 2006-2007 called 'Building Bridges: Hanging out in the North'. CMY's Building Bridges project involved bringing together a group of young women from a number of schools and diverse cultural backgrounds to work together to identify issues, open dialogue and initiate change in their local community.

The Building Bridges initiative was based on an approach used overseas which has shown that discrimination can be tackled by bringing affected groups together with members of the wider community to work on activities that are important to them all. Forty community-based projects were funded by VicHealth throughout Victoria with the common goal of bringing people together to work cooperatively on a shared endeavour. Through this contact, meaningful relationships can form, leading to better understanding between groups. This in turn can help to break down the negative attitudes that lead to discrimination and exclusion.

CMY chose to focus on the City of Hume, in Melbourne's outer north, as an area renowned for its cultural diversity. At the time of the 2001 Census of Population

and Housing, the population of Hume was an estimated 131,772. Approximately 28.8% of the population were born overseas while a further 34.5% speak a language other than English at home.

"I think the stereotypes around us – we can be judged for the things that people have done before us. People can't tell that I'm a Muslim but when I tell them I am, they change, or talk about terrorism, which I can get sometimes offended or hurt by what they're saying."

Farah, Building Bridges participant

Despite this diversity, racial tensions are apparent in the region, with graffiti spread around the area stating things like 'Go home Turks' and 'We don't want no terrorists'. Reports from teachers about fights breaking out in schools due to racial taunts gives an indication of the kinds of tensions apparent in the area. The issues identified by young people from diverse backgrounds who participated in the *Young Leaders of Today* Leadership Training Program (run in partnership between CMY and Red Cross Victoria earlier in 2006) also indicated some common issues and concerns. These included:

- » Feelings of isolation and loneliness;
- » Bullying at school;
- » Feeling discriminated against – especially when seeking employment;
- » Loss of community that they had in previous countries;
- » Feeling like they didn't fit in – both with their parent's traditions and with Australian culture; feeling like they were caught in the middle; and
- » Sense of boredom – lack of events and things for young people to do in the area.

Nearly all the young people felt they were directly affected by prejudicial attitudes on a regular basis.

Objective

CMY's Building Bridges Project aimed to foster relationships between young people who come from a variety of cultural backgrounds (including Anglo-Australian born), and encourage them to be initiators of social change within their own communities.

What we did

"I started in 2006 when it was a leadership program for year 10s. From there, they asked us if we wanted

to put our names for other programs. I put my name and I was in the Building Bridges Girls' Program where we worked together ... and came up with a big event for women in Broadmeadows. It was about: even though we're different, we concentrated on how difference is beautiful – cultural, musical, fashion shows, cultural food. At the end of the day we had some women come up and say their experience in Australia and the difficulties. At the end of the day, everyone was just dancing to the music. It was something beautiful, really beautiful."

Farah, Building Bridges participant

Liaising and Networking

In order to establish a rich and rewarding project that truly sees bridges being built across cultures, it was vital to spend a significant amount of time laying strong foundations for the project. Hours were spent talking with other service providers, liaising with schools, building networks with teachers, nurses, youth workers, presenting at network meetings and spending time to gain a thorough understanding of the Hume area and the issues facing young people there.

In the initial stages of establishing and building networks, many of the young people, teachers, youth workers, social workers and council members from Hume expressed their enthusiasm for a project that would bring young people from various cultures together. Many commented on the huge divide between mainstream and ethno-specific service providers and the need to break down communication barriers and build partnerships.

Establishing a group

During the first stage of establishing the group, it was decided that we didn't want to 'preach to the converted'. The whole basis of the project was to bring people together to learn from each other so we can reduce prejudice.

"My mission was to not take the easy road and work with young people who were already open and committed to the 'cultural harmony' cause, but to also work with young Anglo Australian born students who had very limited contact with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities."

Rachel Murray, CMY Building Bridges Project Worker

Craigieburn is renowned for being a predominantly 'Anglo' suburb in Hume. With the establishment of many new estates, the Welfare Nurse from a local secondary college had been told by some Anglo-Australian born parents, that they moved there to 'get away from the ethnics'. During the initial consultation, staff at Craigieburn Secondary College also reported that there had been incidents of tension between students from their school and those of Roxburgh College (a school with many more students from diverse cultural backgrounds), with fights breaking out on a regular basis.

"There is a white-only gang in Craigieburn going around causing trouble. They have been living in long-term poverty, which is extremely different to circumstantial poverty, and they blame those from different cultures as the cause of their situation. Anyone from CALD backgrounds becomes the target for their anger and, as a result, a strong sense of fear prevails."

School welfare worker, Hume

Staff from Broadmeadows Secondary College also shared stories of segregation between the cultural groups within the school and they really wanted to see the Australian-born, Anglo young women getting to know women from different cultures. After such discussions, CMY felt it was important to work with Australian-born, Anglo young women and the Building Bridges project therefore encouraged Anglo-Australian young women from Broadmeadows Secondary College to join the group.

When asking the (Anglo-Australian) young women about their prior interactions with people from diverse cultural backgrounds in Hume, they said:

"The f--ing Turks are taking over."
 "I've never really had any."
 "I remember playing basketball against a girl wearing a scarf thing from Roxburgh Park."
 "My parents don't like them."
 "None really."
 "One of my mates is half aboriginal."

Group workshops

Group development workshops were facilitated regularly to establish group norms, support participants to get to know each other, develop an understanding of each other's cultural and language differences, and identify and discuss key concerns and issues that prevent social connectedness among diverse cultural groups in the community. Workshops were held weekly or fortnightly depending on school/work commitments, and increased to more regular rehearsals and planning sessions leading up to the final event. Among the group activities, participants engaged in three song-writing workshops, four hip-hop dance workshops, a session on public speaking, and performed at a number of public events including International Women's Day, and Youth Week.

Camp

Part of the project involved a three-day camp. A few young women in the group had been in Australia for less than six months and had never spent a night away from their parents. Others had never held a conversation with someone from a different culture before! Yet in the end, 19 young women were brought together from six different schools in Hume and six different cultural backgrounds (Somali, Ghanaian, Iraqi, Assyrian-Chaldean, East-Timorese/Chinese, Anglo-Australian).

We ran a parent information session before the camp to build trust between CMY and the parents and to ensure they had a good understanding of the essence of the project. It was important the parents knew the important role they had to play.

The camp had a lasting impact on many. It was the foundation for the program: a time when the young women got a chance to really get to know each other. There were fashion shows, dancing, surfing, games, cooking, huge feasts, painting, gum-leaf awards, hula-hooping, midnight snacks and plenty of time spent relaxing and hanging out.

In groups, the young women wrote how they felt before and after the camp and discussed the future direction of the Building Bridges Project. Feelings of nervousness, fear and uncertainty filled the first pages of butchers' paper, but by the end of the camp they spoke of the amazing comfort they felt around each other.

"We're like family now. It feels like we've known each other for ages."

Building Bridges participant

The intensity of the connections between the young women in such a short space of time surprised all the workers. It showed us the importance of creating safe spaces where young people can come together and learn from each other. Many misconceptions were eradicated and fears dispelled.

"I didn't know before that someone wearing a scarf could be so funny."

Anglo-Australian born Building Bridges participant

The impact of the camp on the young women's families was evident when the parents came to pick up their children and saw them all hugging each other goodbye. For example, one parent who had previously expressed fears about his daughter being around 'ethnics' rang up after the camp to say the group was welcome to come to his house for their reunion. He expressed the positive effect the camp had had on his daughter and offered his services for future activities.

"I remember ... they would always drop us off at our house. Rachel would always go and say to your mum: 'Here's your daughter and we did this and that' and mothers would always have her phone number so she could check in. Before the camp they met with our parents so they knew what was happening, what we were going to do."

Farah, Building Bridges participant

Organising a community event: *Ee-Ha-Yeah*

"[We] looked at what are the problems and what do we want to do. We decided we wanted to do an event that, especially in Broadmeadows, people born in Australia don't really know much about migrants and refugees. They just fear them. They don't really have the chance to talk to us. We thought they don't like us, so there's a misunderstanding."

Farah, Building Bridges participant

As a group, the young women decided to organise an event in Broadmeadows that would assist in bringing the wider community to the same conclusions they had discovered: that true friendships can be made with people from different cultural and religious backgrounds and that, through coming together and learning from each other, your own life is greatly enhanced.

The young women decided to call the event and their group 'Ee-Ha-Yeah'. The phrase amalgamates various ways of agreeing to what someone has said: 'Ee' in Arabic, 'Ha' in Somali, Bengali and Urdu, and 'Yeah' in English, Dutch and Indonesian.

In the lead-up to the event, the girls went on an excursion to St Andrews where they wrote a song that they performed at the event, choreographed a dance and worked out the various event management roles they would undertake. They also undertook a public speaking workshop to assist them with speaking engagements in promoting and hosting Ee-Ha-Yeah.

Ee-Ha-Yeah was a community festival organised by the *Building Bridges* group that was open to women from all ages, cultures and parts of Melbourne. The festival was held at Youth Central in Hume on 28th April, 2007, and was attended by over 200 women.



The event featured inspiring female speakers, a cultural fashion parade, a variety of dance items, singers from around the world, a World Music DJ, presentations from the *Building Bridges* young women (including dance and song), tantalising food from around the world, traditional Sudanese coffee, a henna artist, face painting and animal balloons for children, fire-twirling and circus performers, and MCing by a *Building Bridges* participant.

Lyrics to 'Ee-Ha-Yeah'

(written and performed by the Building Bridges participants)

We come from different places, but with the same soul

We've been brought together to achieve a common goal

We live in a world where it's easy to feel alone

Even in the crowd you remain on your own

But if you look around you might just see

So many others who want to be free

We fear other people without knowing who they are

People have been through so much and have come so far

But with a simple conversation, a dance and a smile

You can make a friend forever, it won't take awhile.

Our dream is to build bridges between different cultures

See us now, hear us now

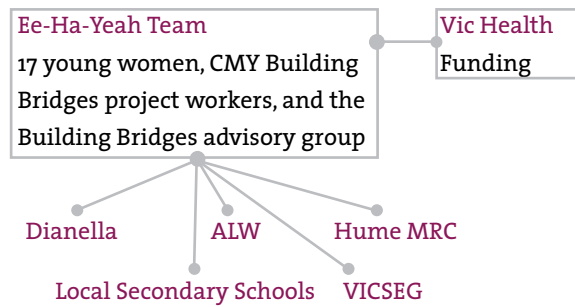
Ee-Ha-Yeah

We want to share this dream with you

Women together, strong and true.

Working in partnership

The *Building Bridges* Project involved building partnerships between a group of young women from diverse backgrounds and schools in the northern region of Melbourne, VicHealth, local secondary schools, and ethno-specific and other community agencies.



Other funding and in-kind support was obtained from School Focused Youth Services (SFYS), Kangan Batman TAFE and the Victorian Arabic Social Services' ARAB Project.

Challenges

Working in Hume has its challenges; the initial collaboration of the group was filled with moments of stress and bewilderment. *How on earth do you make such a project work?* Transport issues, cultural differences, parental concerns, prejudice, and the young people's other time commitments were all hurdles that had to be overcome. Other challenges included:

- » Finding a central meeting place;
- » Limited transport;
- » Keeping young women motivated;
- » Getting everyone together to discuss the project ;
- » Keeping ideas manageable;
- » Building trust with parents;
- » Organising a camp when not sure of definite numbers;
- » Young people are busy and have other commitments that take priority;
- » Creating connections between a group that is so diverse;
- » Personality clashes;
- » Co-ordinating six schools (including welfare workers, coordinators etc not getting back to you); and
- » Parents of Anglo young women not wanting them hanging out with 'ethnics'.

One of the major challenges in running a program such as *Building Bridges* is that the short timelines and withdrawal of financial support from the group at the conclusion of the program does not allow participants to pilot a period of working together as a group autonomously. Additional time and resources could

have supported participants to plan their own network meetings and independent project goals and ensured longer-term sustainability.

Minimal funding resources also limited the scope of team-building activities and youth-led initiatives. Consequently, the need to secure in-kind support proved to be labour-intensive and took resources and worker time away from the group.

Key learning and advice for others embarking on youth-led initiatives

"CMY first ask you what you want. You feel like you're actually putting in; it's not just following. I've been to other programs where it's too basic or not really related to anything – but with CMY you go and say what you want to learn, how we're feeling and what's happening. You feel like you're a part of everything that's happening. You feel like they actually want you to do what you want to do."

Farah, Building Bridges participant

Some key principles

We learnt that, underlying this approach are some key principles. The provision of safe spaces for young people from different cultures to come together enabled stereotypes to be challenged and prejudice to be reduced. Running a gender specific group ensured that the young people felt more relaxed and therefore found it easier to form connections with each other.

An event organised by young people was a great way to empower them. It equipped them with a variety of skills related to event management and inspired them to take those skills and use them in an array of ways in a variety of settings; the outcomes were sustainable. However, this approach required adequate support for project workers as the process required more time.

Fun was an essential component of the project and ensured a low drop-out rate. Partnerships with service

providers in the area improved the outcomes for young people. It was imperative that adequate time was dedicated to debriefing to ensure learnings were properly absorbed and understood by young people.

Important activities

Similarly, we learned about the activities that should be included in a project.

Carefully planned games and activities were essential aspects of enabling young people to build confidence in meeting people from different cultures. Dancing, food and nature were key connecting points for young people. Writing a song with the group provided an alternative way of evaluation that could be shared with others through performance – including family members.

Initiating the project with a three-day camp provided young people with the opportunity to leave their everyday environments and embark on an adventure both physically, geographically and emotionally. Through spending three days on a camp together, the young people were able to forge strong friendships that were a great foundation for the rest of the project.

A final event open to family, friends and other members of the community was a great way of showcasing the work of the project.

Roles of youth workers including communication

Communication and on-going dialogue with parents/guardians of participants ensured that understanding of the project was maintained, therefore consent and support were more readily gained. The limited cultural understandings of a 'youth worker' and limited comprehension of English meant that adequate time needed to be dedicated to ensure relationships between parents and project workers were established and maintained.

Having two project workers for young people ensured adequate support for both workers and young people. Two project workers from different cultures was a key way to role-model 'building bridges' for the group and ensured a greater understanding of young people's needs.

Working with young people in the context of their families

Parents desired activities for themselves and wanted to meet each other but limited resources meant this could not happen. On the other hand, many young people did not want their parents to be involved. They enjoyed the time away from their parents. We learnt that increased communication and on-going dialogue with parents/guardians enhanced their understanding of the project objectives and resulted in informed consent and ongoing support.

Some limiting factors

Limitations to young women's participation included family responsibilities, part time work and limited transportation options. In addition, racist attitudes of parents could restrict young people's involvement in the project.

"I think Building Bridges was really effective because we set goals and were working towards achieving them. With some groups, you don't really know what you're meant to do, so when we set goals and were going step by step into achieving them it was really useful."

Farah, Building Bridges participant

In summary: What works in running inclusive activities with young women?

We feel confident in suggesting the following:

- » **Build in ongoing project activities that are fun and aimed at building skills and confidence:** this keeps young people engaged and supports the development of meaningful and ongoing relationships beyond the project.
- » **Encourage participation in a myriad of ways** (visual, auditory and kinaesthetic engagement): this enables young people to demonstrate their strengths and develop new skills in areas where they may lack confidence.
- » **Support young people to establish group norms** (ways they do and don't want to collaborate) from the outset and throughout the project: this facilitates peer-driven strategies to respect cultural and faith diversity.
- » **Establish good communication with parents/guardians and community groups:** do this from

the early stages and follow up with a celebration of achievements with them.

- » **Build partnerships with local service providers:** this creates opportunities for young people to connect to local initiatives beyond the life of the project.
- » **Employ peer co-facilitators to deliver training and facilitate activities:** they offer positive role modelling and understanding of shared life experiences.
- » **Dedicate adequate time to debriefing:** ensure that learnings are properly absorbed and understood by young people.

Contact:

To find out more about youth participation activities with young people from diverse backgrounds, contact:

Youth Participation Team
Centre for Multicultural Youth
304 Drummond Street
Carlton VIC 3053

Email: info@cmymy.net.au

Url: www.cmymy.net.au

In Summary:

Building Bridges –

‘**Hanging Out in the North**’ is a project organised by the **Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY)** in Melbourne, Victoria to develop inclusive activities with young women. The project aims to foster relationships between young people who come from a variety of cultural backgrounds and encourage them to be initiators of social change within their own communities.

Through provision of safe spaces for young people from different cultures to come together, stereotypes are challenged and thus prejudice is reduced. Through spending three days on a camp together, the young people are able to forge strong friendships that are a great foundation for the rest of the project.

Key learnings from the project have been that:

- » it’s important to spend the time to lay strong foundations through liaison with key groups, and discussion with stakeholders and young people;
- » building trust with parents is crucial;
- » running gender specific groups ensures that young people feel more relaxed and therefore find it easier to form connections with each other; and
- » fun is an essential component of the project and ensures a low drop-out rate.

The project says it **works** because it:

- » includes ongoing project activities that are fun and aimed at building skills and confidence. These are important for keeping young people engaged and also support the development of meaningful and ongoing relationships beyond the project;
- » encourages participation in a myriad of ways (visual, auditory and kinaesthetic engagement) to enable young people to demonstrate their strengths and develop new skills in areas where they may lack confidence;
- » supports young people to establish group norms from the outset and throughout the project. This facilitates peer-driven strategies to respect cultural and faith diversity;
- » establishes good communication with parents, guardians and community groups in early stages and follow up with a celebration of achievements with them;
- » builds partnerships with local service providers. This enables young people to connect to local initiatives beyond the life of the project;
- » employs peer co-facilitators to deliver training and facilitate activities. This offers positive role modelling and understanding of shared life experiences; and
- » dedicates adequate time to debriefing. This is imperative to ensure learnings are properly absorbed and understood by young people.



The Port Pirie ‘Flipside’

(Flexible Learning Initiative Programs Strengthening Innovative Directions in Education)

Innovative Community Action Network (ICAN)

The Flipside Community Action Network aims to meet the educational needs of all young people in the Port Pirie area in South Australia, including those who are either disengaged from school or at risk of not successfully completing school. The focus is early intervention and a planned multi-strategy approach.

Flipside uses a whole-of-community approach that is jointly delivered by John Pirie Secondary School (JPSS), BoysTown, Uniting Care Wesley Port Pirie, Centacare, the South Australian Police (SAPOL) and other agencies and networks within the Port Pirie Youth Sector. The approach brings together young people, families, schools, community groups, businesses and government to find local solutions to barriers that prevent young people from successfully completing their education. The Secondary School (JPSS) and the community are working together to provide learning programs that are supported with

individual case management within and beyond the classroom to meet the learning and life needs of these young people.

There are many pathways into the **Flipside** programs. Students can self-nominate or they can be nominated by their parents, caregivers, youth workers or teachers. Their needs are then assessed by the school’s ‘Students at Risk’ team to create individual learning plans and programs. Annie Inkster, who is a Counsellor at John Pirie Secondary School, describes the diversity of participants:

"In the early stages, most of the young participants in the program were described by teachers as ‘class wreckers’. More recently, it’s a whole range of student with varied and complex needs. But consistently, it’s young people who have struggled to attend school on a regular basis... We have full time attendees and part timers who just want some time away from the more formal classroom setting. With the full time Flipside students, we concentrate on helping them get ready to enter the workforce."

Jodie Gregg-Smith is the Upper Spencer ICAN Coordinator¹, Chairperson of the Port Pirie Youth Sector Network, and a former Youth and Community Officer in the North East Local Service Area for SAPOL (South Australian Police). She adds further information about the participants:

"Some are accelerated learners, taking on extra subjects; some are addressing baggage prior to re-engaging in learning. Many self-refer to the program."

The formal objectives of Flipside are listed on their website. These are to:

- » create a more relevant, meaningful and inclusive curriculum to engage participants successfully in learning or earning pathways;
- » improve attendance;
- » provide a variety of options in relevant accredited learning;
- » increase literacy and numeracy;
- » create a whole of community model for a sustainable approach to social inclusion and wellbeing of young people;
- » address and increase emotional wellbeing through early intervention, case management and support; and
- » strengthen student-teacher relationships and provide a whole-school pedagogical model to include students at risk.²

The ICAN program is funded by the South Australian State Government, including the full time funding of regional coordinators. Additionally individual students within ICAN schools can be funded through Flexible Learning Options (FLO) funding.

Strategies

There are three main resources in the **Flipside** initiative, and these form three inter-connected strategies.

¹ Innovative Community Action Networks (ICANs) are part of the South Australian Government's School Retention Action Plan to keep young people engaged in education. ICANs use a multi-agency case management approach with several people from different agencies working together with the young person and their school to identify problems and overcome issues.

² ICAN Website: <http://www.ican.sa.edu.au/pages/programs/>

The first has been the **development of a flexible learning centre based within a school**.³ This is the **Flipcentre** at John Pirie Secondary School, which provides mentoring and one-on-one support to help young people get back into learning. Students attend for a wide variety of reasons: due to conflict with teachers and peers, because of specific learning difficulties, in order to focus on a particular subject, because they work better independently, or because they work faster or slower than their class. Some students use **Flipcentre** because they are on an accelerated learning program or because they are completing some TAFE units whilst still at school.

So there are no typical students in **Flipside** or typical patterns of attendance. Attendance at the Flipcentre varies from occasional to full time with some students there once a week for a specific program, whilst others use the **Flipcentre** more frequently as a tutorial centre.

Annie Inkster describes the **Flipcentre** as "primarily a learning centre." She says:

*"It's set up to maintain a young person's connection to school and to destigmatise that some students learn in different ways. Part of **Flipcentre's** success lies in recognising those students who need that extra person in the school to create a sense of belonging. For some young people, **Flipcentre** can be the difference between deciding to stay home or come to school.*

Students work in small groups or on individual programs with one teacher. The teacher acts as a mentor and gets to know the students, supports their learning programs and keeps that connection with the school.

*In the beginning, most young people were referred through our 'students at risk' team. Now most self-refer or are identified through our counselling process. Some students will come in and say: 'I can't face my classes, can I go to **Flips?**' It might only be for a couple of classes, but it keeps those young people engaged and allows us time to look at the*

³ John Pirie Secondary School provides funding for this **Flipcentre**

other issues in their lives that are affecting their attendance and learning. "

Jodie Gregg-Smith describes other key aspects of **Flipcentre**:

*"It's an approach that is inclusive of the whole range of services. The **Flipcentre** is not as threatening for young people. It's like a transitioning centre: students going out to TAFE, work experience, appointments with JPET, Centrelink. It's a wellbeing centre for students whilst they take that journey. It is a learning centre critically, but it also offers support for students coming in and out of school. Students who've been disengaged might ease back in through the **Flipcentre**. It's about supporting young people who are seeking direction in their lives.*

Young people are provided with case-managers, trained youth workers who work for Uniting Care Wesley and from the Youth Pathways program.

Most importantly, it's about having the most appropriate people there on site, who can address their barriers: a case-manager who can help with the wrap-around support whenever needed. If possible, [that's] someone independent of the school. "

Some of the students describe their reasons for being in the **Flipcentre** and how it helps them:

*"I'm in **Flips** because I'm doing a TAFE course that involves working on a booklet about horses. Seeing as I'm in **Flipside**, I don't have to be doing it at home where I might not get any help.*

*When I'm in **Flips** it helps me to catch up with my work 'cos I've get extra help.*

I can't work in a mainstream classroom without knocking anyone out. At the moment I'm doing my TAFE studies in horses; I'm doing SACE English and Australian Studies.

*I need help with my English. It's good 'cos I'm confident in my English work now. I like it in **Flips** 'cos*

it's quiet and I get my work done. 4 "

Annie Inkster describes the day-to-day approaches used:

*"The young people have more control over the process of their own learning. The students are guided in their program, with the teacher or SSO supporting the students to get out of it what they want to achieve. On their timetable it appears as '**Flips Program**' with the name of the teacher they've got.*

It's not set up as a classroom where students get in and find out from the teacher what you've got to do next. The students decide which areas they work on, or which aspects of their schoolwork they need to finish. We help them to plan their program or plan for the week. We work as mentors to assist them with their work.

Every student has a pigeonhole here with a folder. They each have a plan for the week in their folder and their mentor works with them to fill in their learning plan. Students get used to setting goals and developing plans to achieve those goals. You can really get to know them, their family, likes and dislikes, where they see themselves as being strong and the areas in which they struggle.

So Steph, for example, came to see me yesterday morning. She struggles to concentrate because of all of her medications. She asked: 'I need an SSO to help me with my Australian Studies 'cos I'm not going to be able to focus and complete it myself.' I suggested that a Year 10 student and an SSO work with her on it, so that both could get assistance in this SACE unit. Students are learning how to cooperate and support each other in their learning. "

The second strategy has been the **development of a flexible learning centre based within a community agency**: BoysTown. BoysTown has students on a wide range of arrangements from occasional through to full time.

Most courses offered here are hands-on, working with

4 John Pirie Secondary School provides funding for this **Flipcentre**

tradespeople or on pre-employment or pre-TAFE courses. Some students attend for the equivalent of one subject per week, for example building billycarts. Some attend for a short program such as a 'Girls Group'. Others attend full time for up to several years. The students are usually 14 and 15 years old and are chronically disengaged or excluded boys and girls. Jodie describes Boystown as "off-campus learning, with community based learning options. It's about life learning as much as education. Young people continue to gain skills away from the school environment." Regular communication between BoysTown, other agencies and the school ensures each student's progress is closely monitored.

BoysTown has entered into partnerships with local industry or government departments and employs experienced tradespeople. This gives young people supported work experience within a wide range of local businesses and industries. In 2006, for example, young people worked alongside skilled tradespeople refurbishing Housing Trust Homes, gaining real and relevant work experience, including work ethics, and skills such as welding and woodwork.

Karen Clarke, Youth Worker at BoysTown in Port Pirie, says:

"We've got three tradespeople employed by BoysTown as construction supervisors. They have been employed to work on all our enterprises. We've got one tradie who's a plumber, who's had his own business for many years. He's a real asset. Has so much in life skills to teach the young people."

BoysTown's motto is: 'Brother and sister to all'. I think that's the magic of the people who work here: they all treat the kids like their own. They might be supervisors to the kids, but they're also seen on the same level. They don't judge. They're quite open to what the young people have got to say and will listen to them."

Scarlett (not her real name) is 16 years old and a student at **Flipside**. She describes her experiences there:

"I got in too much trouble at my school so I came here. I'm doing a couple of days TAFE, a day here and a couple of days at school. At school I'll do Maths and English in the Flipcentre which I've been using since about half way through this term when I got kicked

off the bike program. Here the teachers are nice and speak nicely and listen to everyone's decisions and they don't say anything if you say something wrong. They just say: 'Good work for trying'.

I've tried metal. I've done a girls' program, the park, woodwork and art.

In the girls' program I learnt about job interviews, how to do makeup and all that. In 'park' I went over with a whole heap of people and helped keep the park clean. I learnt how to cut trees and what plants were what. In woodwork I made a box. I've started making a sawhorse and I've started a table and nearly completed it. In art I've done sculpturing, painting, and tile work for my table. I'll probably give it to my mum. I enjoy getting to be outside here.

Since I've been here I've changed heaps. I sit there and study and if I get given homework I do it. Corinna helped me change a lot. She sits there and listens when you're having a bad day. Practically everyone has helped me change. My attitude at school is different. I don't talk to half my old friends. I just sit with my sister and tell her about what I've been doing. We sat in here at the end of last term and decided if we wanted to go back to school or stay here and do woodwork and metal or cooking."

The third strategy has been the **development of a strong network of youth sector agencies** that are coming into these flexible learning centres to meet the needs of marginalised young people. The *Port Pirie Youth Sector Network* comprises 23 agencies or organisations. At each network meeting, time is set aside to discuss the **Flipside** program. Agencies are made aware of the needs of the program and opportunities to work with the students.

Beyond this, the participation of welfare agencies is diverse. Some are forging longer term and formal partnerships with the school to undertake case-management. Others engage in dialogue with **Flipside** to meet the needs of shared clients. Annie Inkster describes some of the interactions:

"We meet monthly with Uniting Care Wesley (UCW) and Youth Pathways to discuss the case-management of our students and other programs that might be offered, such as a retail course at TAFE. We have a partnership agreement with UCW so that we fully

understand the service they are providing, and they understand what we are doing, and what our agreed goals are. "

This out-sourcing of case management is a relatively new approach by the school and Annie emphasises:

"The school counsellor is a pivotal person – involved with education but also a contact with all the agencies that are providing support for students, often on a confidential basis. I work with mental health agencies, Families SA, and BoysTown. Now, through the partnerships that we have developed through ICAN/FLO⁵ and the case management that is occurring, a more inclusive structure is in place that supports a young person's education within the context of the whole community – and all the other aspects of their lives. "

Writing in the ICAN Newsletter, Jodie Gregg-Smith describes the range of possibilities through this arrangement:

"Having such a broad range of agencies in the Youth Sector Network means that a variety of programs can be offered. These might include programs in self-esteem, relationships, anger management and bullying. However, instead of agencies approaching schools and finding students to fill the program, it is individual students' needs that determine the programs to be run. "

Outcomes for young people

There are four key outcomes for young people from the **Flipside** initiative: improved self esteem and raised ambition for participants; improved attendance; optimising achievement; and reduced juvenile crime.

When Bruce Mules, Coordinator of the **Flipcentre** at John Pirie Secondary School spoke at the ICAN State Conference in August 2007, he identified that destination data for participants in **Flipside** to that time showed that there had been a reduction in number of referrals to the restart room (for behavioural management), improved subject grades, five of the top 15 GPAs in our school were students

who had attended **Flipcentre**, and there were improved attendance records. The ICAN website similarly lists outcomes for young people:

- » 78% are re-engaged in mainstream learning;
- » 22% have gained employment; and
- » there is a 40% reduction in youth offending.

What works and why?

Those involved with **Flipside** point to three major learnings about its success:

Provide flexible learning options for all young people, not just those 'at risk'

Jodie Gregg-Smith says that it is important that there isn't stigma associated with the program because "it's never thrust upon them":

"Some of the young people who access the Flipcentre are accelerated learners taking on extra subjects. Some have a breakdown of relationships with a teacher or other students. Others have some baggage that they need to have addressed prior to re-engaging in learning. A lot of kids self-refer to the program. Some think it's going to be a bludge, then they realise the potential for doing great things and are able to revisit some of the issues that were inhibiting them. Then they just flourish. Education has to be flexible and progressive. This program recognises the need to allocate additional resources to young people who have greater needs. "

Support young people individually through a process, as opposed to expecting them to conform and fit into one system

Jodie again notes:

"Young people have had access to a range of learning and teaching styles. They've been supported individually through a process, as opposed to being expected to conform and fit into one system. This is giving them a say in the direction of their learning, where they are able to unashamedly admit (without judging) that they have some issues and barriers.

⁵ Flexible Learning Options

They are being helped to address these issues so they can then get on with learning and achieve competencies – rather than scoring badly on a written test. This is so great for self-confidence: tailoring their education program. Kids have a sense of ownership they've never had before, and feel like they're making the decisions for themselves. In the past, 10 to 15 agencies met to discuss what they were going to do about that student without asking them. This gives them space to be asked. "

Schools acting as hubs for whole of community responsibility for social inclusion

Annie Inkster says that the school is central to each student's growth:

"The school is the place where young people want to reconnect with each other and with mainstream society. It's really important that young people stay connected with education. If you're going to function as a citizen and have some control over your life, you need an education that is accredited. You may be able to get there in different ways, but it's still schooling that people value. "

However, emphasises Jodie, "it's about these things not just being the schools' responsibility. The school can be the vehicle or catalyst for making things happen, but the network has a fair investment in it."

The program also reports some very practical issues. It works better when:

- » the school administration places senior staff within a flexible learning centre, where there is the potential for a broader challenging of the reasons young people are marginalised within classrooms;
- » trained teachers are provided at Boystown to work on developing a functional group, to examine the reasons young people are marginalised within classrooms, and to bring those learnings back to the school;
- » workers can take the time to visit each other's workplace, to understand the strengths and weaknesses there, and to have an understanding of each partner's role and mission statement;
- » the school can provide ongoing, face-to-face support to

both staff and students;

- » workers in the flexible learning centres can be advocates for students in the school; and
- » teachers are prepared to be self-critical and share knowledge of students.

In summary, what works here is providing flexible learning options for all students, including one to one support by mentors, teachers and counsellors in small groups, as well as practical, hands-on activities as well as assistance with formal studies. Students play an active role in deciding what they need to do, but there are also teachers who know the students well and provide structured programs, with clear rules and expectations. Community services provide support, with the school acting as the hub for whole of community responsibility.

Contact:

To further information, or to contact the **Flipside ICAN** program, see the ICAN Website:

Flipside ICAN

Url: www.ican.sa.edu.au

In Summary

Port Pirie's Flipside (Flexible Learning Initiative) is part of South Australia's Innovative Community Action Network. It provides a withdrawal support program that aims to:

- » improve attendance;
- » provide a variety of options in relevant accredited learning;
- » increase literacy and numeracy;
- » create a whole of community model for a sustainable approach to social inclusion and wellbeing of young people;
- » address and increase emotional wellbeing through early intervention, case management and support; and
- » strengthen student-teacher relationships and provide a whole-school pedagogical model to include high achieving students and students at risk.

Outcomes for young people have been:

- » improved self esteem and raised ambition;
- » improved attendance;
- » optimised achievement; and
- » reduced juvenile crime.

Key learnings from the project have been that it works better when:

- » trained teachers participate in the centres;
- » there is good interaction between school and centres;
- » workers can advocate for students; and

- » the school can take a whole-school approach to flexible learning.

The project says it **works** because it:

- » provides flexible learning options for all students;
- » provides one to one support by mentors, teachers, counsellors in small groups;
- » provides hands-on, practical activities and assistance with formal studies;
- » ensures students decide what they need to do;
- » has teachers who know the kids well;
- » provides structured programs, with clear rules and expectations;
- » involves community services for support; and
- » enables the school acts as the hub for whole of community responsibility.



The Youth Enterprise Trust

What works in transition to adulthood through wilderness experiences

The Youth Enterprise Trust conducts a program that stands as a rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood for disadvantaged and other young Australians aged 16 to 24 years. In so doing, this wilderness-based experience helps young people discover a deep sense of connection to their country and community, and the drive to achieve their own goals.

motivation and action to pursue responsible and fulfilling vocations which are true to each individual and make essential and creative contributions to the community

a deeper self-understanding and self-reliance



a special appreciation of Australia's cultural and environmental heritage

The journey the participants travel can be understood as a ritual consisting of three interrelated segments: **separation, submission and reintegration.** (These segments are shared by initiation rituals throughout the world.) The success of the ritual as a whole depends on the completion of each segment. The Trust achieves

these aims through providing financial scholarships to undertake a program with three sequential and integrated phases:

- » a uniquely designed **Wilderness Experience** at Saddler Springs, a remote cattle property in the Carnarvon Ranges, Central Queensland ... immediately followed by:
- » the **Kurrajong** phase based at Woodstock, the Trust's home on a farm property near Mount Tamborine in south-east Queensland ... immediately followed by:
- » the **Back to Woodstock** phase: up to 12 months of follow up support for each of the graduates who complete the program. In addition each group of graduates is invited back to Woodstock for a half day.

The Trust

The Youth Enterprise Trust is an independent charitable organisation established in 1990 and based at Woodstock, a beautiful 300 acre farm on the Albert River at the base of Mount Tamborine. This provides a private location that is close to the main southern corridor of South-East Queensland.

The Trust has chosen since its inception not to seek any government funding for its programs. It wishes to demonstrate its own commitment to program principles and ensure a meaningful connection with supporters. Currently over 52% of YET's funding comes through individual contributions with about 26% from corporate sponsorship, 6% raised through events (the primary event is the Annual Bush Fair), 9% raised through grants and 6% through fee for service.

The Trust actively seeks to provide program places for young people from a range of backgrounds and perspectives to encourage cultural mixing of young people eg privileged and disadvantaged, rural and urban, Indigenous, ethnic and white. Self-paying applicants are considered with a preferred ratio of eight Trust-sponsored to two fully self-paying participants on each program. For details of the application requirements, costs and transport, see the YET website at:

www.yet.net.au

Entering the program

Most young people who attend our programs are referred to us from youth agencies such as alternative education providers, schools, drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres, and supported accommodation places or directly by parents and guardians. An application form is then sent to them and several phone conversations generated from this. Stage 1 of the conversations is to determine eligibility: are they the correct age? – which is a very important aspect for this program. Our minimum age is 16 years as our major focus is to assist their transition from adolescence towards becoming fully functioning adults. Stage 2 of the conversations is to determine that the young people themselves are agreeing to fully commit to this and have some willingness or readiness for change.

Jeanette McGee is Community Liaison Officer and has been working for Youth Enterprise Trust since the beginning of 2008. She previously worked as Project Coordinator on several youth-based projects targeting a similar client group in London. She explains:

"Our aim is to try to get young people who are at

the point of a readiness to change or who have an awareness of a need to change. My main job is to identify this with potential participants...

It's all done over the phone. It's getting from applicants some articulation, some awareness that they have some issues or problems and they are at that point where they are saying: 'I know I need to do something in order to change that.' They might not express it in exactly those words, but it's the essence of what they are saying.

We are very deliberate in making sure the young people are part of the decision. They have to want to be part of the project: that's core to what we are doing. They sign off that they agree to abide by the aims of the project. At times we might have to reinforce that commitment because it's not an easy process to go through. "

Paul Cuskelly is a program leader who has been working for Youth Enterprise Trust for five years. In that time, he has been involved in about 30 programs with varying groups of young people. "We talk about disadvantaged," he says, "but that can be anything, from socio-economic disadvantage, to coming out of drug rehabilitation centres – but it can also include young people who are high achievers in say Year 11-12 who don't have any idea of what they want to do."

Michael (not his real name) is a 20 year old program participant. "Personally I think I'm an individual," he says. "I don't try to please too many people. I'm out there looking for a new challenge and now I've got a plan." He describes how he came to the Youth Enterprise Trust:

Part of my story is that I've been in rehab for a while and I've just come out and I sort of thought it might be a good transition – getting used to being 'outside' and learning to do things on my own. It did sort of help with things like that. When I first rocked up, I didn't really know too much about what we were doing, but everything was cool and we were told we'd be camping tomorrow and better get an early night and we wake up the next morning and find we're going on a three-day hike, so that was interesting!

Phase 1: The Wilderness Experience

Our wilderness experience occurs at Saddler Springs, a remote 20,000 acre property adjoining Carnarvon Gorge and Mount Moffat National Parks in Central Queensland, at Junjuddie Flat. Junjuddie Flat is a pioneer-style bush outstation, hidden in an enclosed valley at the foot of 1,000 metre cliffs. Each course is single sex, currently with a maximum of nine participants. We have male and female leaders.

Paul describes the start of this phase:

"We approach the question of transition through a challenging wilderness experience that is both isolated and contained, with a background of rite of passage. Having looked at rites of passage around the world, we use the aboriginal rites as a loose basis because we are all part of this country – we are all Australians and this is part of Australia."

They board a bus in Brisbane. The program doesn't actually start until we get them off the bus in Roma. They have that 8 to 10 hour period where they can go through the normal group processes of 'storming, norming, forming' and so there might be relationships established in that stage – but during the first phase of the program they tend to go through that process again."

Jeanette adds:

"Before the walk, we actually give them only a general idea of what's going to happen, so when they are in that journey, they're not entirely sure of what is going to happen... It's very much about us walking alongside them, with them, through the journey and that's very much how we gauge the whole experience for each of them."

The experience is either nine or ten days' duration and occurs in three stages:

Stage one: The Walk-In

This is a demanding three day trek, through beautiful and ancient country on the ridges overlooking Carnarvon Gorge... setting up bush camp each night and taking

solitary 'night watch' to ensure the pack horse does not stray... learning about the local natural environment throughout the trek... Upon arrival into Junjuddie Flat, participants feel an incredible sense of achievement.

Michael reflects:

"The first day was actually the hardest, you know, just getting used to the idea that we're going on this three-day hike. I'd been camping before, but not to that extent. It was quite a good hike, walking up and down this range, seeing all these beautiful sights, the sunset. And I've never really been that far out into the bush – so far away from civilization."

Paul notes that *"The way the group works out depends a lot on the individuals and their personalities. Sometimes they assist one another voluntarily, but sometimes we have to prompt or ask for help with a backpack for example."*

Michael adds:

"We had to go and find our own water, we had to ration our food properly, had to learn how to do up a horse to carry some of our gear... Cooking was shared around each day and we had a daily ration, with not much meat because of no refrigeration – mainly high carb stuff, like pasta, plenty of vegetables and stuff. I'm not much of a picky eater, but some guys had to deal with it a bit. We camped out with sleeping bags and mats. We had a couple of cold nights when the wind picked up."

Some of it was pretty hard and, as a group, we had to join together to help each other out... that was a bit of a challenge. Some of the guys weren't as fit as others and needed a bit of encouragement and every now and then, if they got worn out, some of us would help carry their packs... We had to push ourselves up this range. I was fit enough and I completed it... you learn to push on really.

Stage two: The Work Phase

This involves living and working as a community, as early European settlers of the area lived on remote pioneer stations... living in pine slab huts with no electricity, chopping wood to fuel stoves, clearing fire breaks, pumping water... participants can see and feel the results of their physical work, knowing they are making a real contribution to themselves, the group and the immediate country.

Stage three: Mount Moffat National Park

This is an exploration of traditional local Aboriginal culture in Mount Moffat National Park and is a reflective and crucial stage: through learning the meaning behind the ancient rock art and burial sites in which they sit, and the ritual of initiation practised there years ago, participants can enhance their perspective on their own transition to adulthood and the practical changes they want to and need to make in their own lives.

Paul describes this:

"We walk into some huts that are in the middle of a 30,000 acre property. With boys' groups we do three days of work there, basic manual work, basic labour... cutting and carting firewood, carting rocks to fix roads, fencing. After the work stage we then go to Mount Moffat National Park and visit some Aboriginal sites there and then we come back to Tamborine and that's where they do their action plan. Ongoing throughout the activity, stories are told that build to the Mount Moffat section... about the people who lived there, an initiation talk that, with a bit of reflection, can relate to their own lives, a talk about the death of a culture, a talk about Aboriginal beliefs about death and re-birth. Most respond with a great deal of interest because it's mostly foreign territory for most of them. If they can see the parallels with their own journey, it becomes a lot stronger and more effective for them.

We see changes: physical – diet is possibly a significant part of that because there's no junk food; the food we eat is fairly basic but it's wholesome food. For some young males, lack of meat can be a huge issue. Some ADHD or ADD have observable changes.

Some young people seem to actually find themselves and stand up and walk straighter having made the achievement. The girls' program follows pretty much the same program, but we only do two days' work with the girls... that's not a physical consideration; they seem to be more attuned to what's going on and need less time. "

Phase 2: The Kurrajong Phase

The Kurrajong Phase immediately follows the Wilderness Phase and is of three days' duration. Participants stay on-site at Woodstock (the Trust's farm property near Mount Tamborine in South East Queensland) for the whole phase. At the moment this phase involves three core activities focused on providing a transition from the wilderness back to their normal lives:

1. Vocational/Life Skills Planning: assisting each participant to identify and act upon their vocational and personal choices following completion of the program.
2. Kurrajong Services: Each young person works to create their own bush stool using old implements rarely used these days. It's about working on something and having a finished product at the end which they can take home and, if possible, they are encouraged to make a second one which can be sold at our Bush Fair (our major fundraising event).
3. Graduation: Each young person is allowed to invite two personal support people to attend their graduation, which is held on the third and final day. This ceremony gives them the opportunity to feel proud of what they have accomplished and, at the same time, give their family and friends greater understandings of the process they have been through personally and as a group. They are each presented with their completed action plans, their bush stool and a graduation certificate and they then leave to go home.

Michael describes the three stages:

"One of the guides was telling us stories about the Aborigines and how the men would grab the young boys in the middle of the night and take them bush for initiations and after a while they'd go back to camp and they weren't the same person – they were actually a man then. We saw the links with our experience. We thought at first we were just going on a walk, but in the end it all tied together. The day before we graduate, we sit down with someone and create a plan for the future and when we leave from here, the contact goes on. For some people that's good because they need a bit of structure in their lives. "

Phase 3: Back to Woodstock

The Back to Woodstock Phase of the Youth Enterprise Trust Program aims to provide an extended period of encouragement to the young people recently graduated from the program. One of the members of staff is given the role of periodically calling each of the young people who have graduated. This phone call is aimed at encouraging self management and retaining commitment to pursuing the personal and vocational goals identified during the earlier phases. Graduates receive regular follow-up for up to 12 months and, in addition to this, each group of graduates are invited 'Back to Woodstock' within three months of their graduation. This half-day event is an opportunity for them to rekindle friendships and reinspire each other. It also gives the YET team an opportunity to get more detailed feedback from them as to the impact of the program on their personal situations and lives. Jeanette explains:

"We have a number of young people who need follow up (eg one young man who is a primary carer for his mother and is carrying a lot of responsibility), or they may need assistance with accommodation. It is very important for us that these young people are supported after the first two stages of the program have been completed. I ring fairly regularly to ask: 'How are you going? What's been happening?' – keeping in touch. We have to be careful of not allowing them to become too dependent on us.

We also have a 'Back to Woodstock' day when each group comes back for a Saturday. This is a chance to catch up with each other, reconnect, reinspire each other and a chance for us to see how they've been going at a deeper level than the phone calls. Perhaps some of them might be ready to volunteer for a longer involvement in aspects of what we do. In our long-term plan, we're keen to have participants come on as 'apprentices' or trainee leaders."

Paul adds that, in the last few weeks, he'd heard from someone who did the program 14 years ago: "They sent us an email to say this is where I am now and this is what I've done... It's amazing when something like that happens."

Why does the program work?

Paul points to the Trust's symbol, the three-pointed Kurrajong leaf (the Kurrajong tree is native to the area walked to and at Tamborine):

"We try to link the young people to the land and to the wider community. The process of going through the activities hopefully draws out those links for them. They can see through the program that what they have done gives them a link with the land and then how they live in that small team adds 'community'. When, through feedback, we ask: 'did this program make a difference?' we get an 85% positive feedback. In addition, we have a follow up program that goes for up to 12 months."

Jeanette adds:

"The activity gives a sense of accomplishment: it's hard, it's tough, and they can look back and say: 'I did that'. We see young men leave us with their heads held high, with a sense of real pride in what they have done, a real sense of who they are. We encourage respect for the bush, for each other, for the guides, for whoever is talking. Many of them haven't had an adult say: 'we respect you, we want to listen to what you've got to say.'"

Jeanette tells the stories of some of the young people who have engaged in our program. For example Sharon (not her real name) is Aboriginal but a city girl through and through.

"She's been in a bit of superficial trouble and has been entirely uninterested in Aboriginal tradition. During the last days of the YET experience, Sharon and the other girls were taken to a cave full of rock art. Until then, Sharon had been happy-go-lucky, positively engaged, and popular in the group. We scarcely noticed, but she sat in the cave with her back turned away from the group. As we went to leave, I noticed her still sitting and went up to her. She was silently sobbing. She asked to stay on at the cave alone and did so for another hour or so. She rejoined our camp, still with fat tears rolling down her cheeks. But she finally recovered and resumed her cheerful

self. Next afternoon, during our Appa (the closing ceremony during which each young person has a turn to speak for as long or short as they like), Sharon gave one of the greatest tear-filled and emotionally charged speeches I have ever heard – on her deeper discovery of her Aboriginality, a connection to her previously rejected and now deceased grandparents, cultural loss, need for renewal and beginning again, black-white reconciliation through blacks and whites reconnecting to this land which unites us all. That was almost a decade ago and, after eight years of non-communication, I have just received a phone call from Sharon. She rang to say she had since studied and worked in various parts of the world, has just returned home and is a professional singer. She said that moment in the cave ‘remains the defining experience of my life and if ever you guys need any help, I would be there anywhere, anytime.’ ”

Similarly, Mary was a heroin addict and prostitute since 14 years of age, and was now undergoing residential drug rehabilitation. However, when she decided to ‘chuck it in’, her carers suggested she try YET first.

” Mary completed the wilderness experience stoically and apparently indifferently. But, on the last day, in her hour or two of solitude on a creek bank deep in the bush, it was a dramatically different girl I found. I visited her briefly during that Solitude. Her eyes were filled with water but still she said nothing to me. But on that afternoon, during her Appa, she spoke out at some length – detailed references to her painful past, the effects of the bush here and the visit to the initiation and burial sites – her new understandings of death, rebirth, and hope. She announced she was going back into rehab to try and beat heroin and hoped one day to do a science degree. She is currently completing a PhD and has spoken publicly about the fact the wilderness experience alone saved her life. Also, those memories of particular places and moments that she experienced in the wilderness have helped sustain her ‘state of being’ ever since. In a media interview, another heroin addict and YET graduate specifically likened the YET Experience to a powerful ‘ritual’ and dependable metaphor for life as she has found it since. ”

Michael, who is a recent graduate, explains why he thinks the program works:

” You have to set goals and strive for them, and if you don’t try you don’t really know. You’ve got to push yourself and, if you get there, you haven’t just sat around saying ‘I should have done that’. It opened my eyes to those sort of things.

It was a struggle for me. I had to push myself, especially on the three-day hike. It made me do a lot of thinking – not always fairly positive thinking – some of it was quite negative in some sense, but I got through it OK.

It taught me to be thankful for the small things. You know, some people aren’t as fortunate as others; they might just survive getting enough food on the table. ”

He was asked how the activities helped him to reach these conclusions.

” You learn to push yourself, learn to ration food. You mightn’t always be able to ‘kick back’ when you want to; you always have to be on the ball. If someone isn’t pulling their weight, you might have to take ‘em aside and talk about what’s wrong... Living on the bare necessities; not having all this extra stuff around; relying on one another to get through. I found I had the strength to help others.

It can actually open your mind a bit; it can broaden your horizons and make you think a lot more. I think that’s why they get you out there, so you actually start thinking... You don’t have mates saying ‘want to come out for a party’ instead of thinking about your future. I wouldn’t try and convince someone to do it; I’d only be able to tell ‘em what I’ve got out of it and what I think is good about it. You have to make up your own mind.

Just finishing this has opened up a few options, and I haven’t ruled any out yet – possibly doing this sort of work, working with young people, possibly joining the army or working on a property – those sort of things. I’m going back to Brisbane and trying to follow on with this plan I’ve created for myself. ”

Jeanette notes that there was a remarkable and obvious transformation in nearly all of the young men who graduated early in 2008.

"Parents and referrers made enthusiastic reference to this: 'I saw (name deleted) standing tall and he looked me in the eye for the first time. I was then surprised to see him go up and publicly give his mum a hug; this is the only occasion I have seen him display affection in public'. Another of the young boys, on travelling home with his friend, told her that he felt clean after this experience.

Already one of the young men has achieved the first step of his action plan and has got himself a full time job, and another participant has got himself back at school (after a fairly long period of disengagement)."

So, in summary, this program works for many of the young people because it gives them the opportunity to feel valued and respected and part of something unique. "We are not sure exactly how to describe that feeling," says Jeanette, "but it is very obvious." And she points to critical aspects of the program:

*"We try to judge when and if participants are ready for the program;
It's physically and mentally challenging;
It requires young people to use their personal resources and to work together;
It's very structured and led by experienced and qualified people;
It's conducted in the bush, which works its own magic; and
We maintain contact and follow-up for up to 12 months."*

Contact:

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In Summary

The Youth Enterprise Trust at Mount Tamborine in Queensland provides transition to adulthood through wilderness experiences. It aims to:

- » assist young people in their transition to adulthood; and
- » foster deeper self-understanding and self-reliance, appreciation of our cultural and environmental heritage.

Outcomes for young people have been:

- » improved self esteem and raised ambition;
- » a stronger sense of community; and
- » a strong sense of personal achievement and self-realisation.

Key learnings from the project have been that:

- » the nature of the activities is crucial;
- » groups can build strong support for members;
- » activities give young people a link with the land; and
- » how young people live in a small team adds 'community'.

The project says it works because it:

- » offers challenging activities that give a sense of accomplishment;
- » provides opportunities to feel valued and respected;
- » tries to judge when and if participants are ready for the program;
- » provides activities that are physically and mentally challenging;
- » enables young people to use their personal resources and to work together;
- » provides a very structured program led by experienced and qualified people;
- » conducts activities in the bush, which works its own magic; and
- » maintains contact and follow-up for 12 months.



Encouraging and Supporting Young People

The Cairns Youth Mentoring Scheme (CYMS)

What works in mentoring socially isolated young people

Anita Andacic, Centacare Cairns CYMS Co-ordinator

The Cairns Youth Mentoring Scheme (CYMS) is a program of Centacare Cairns. It is a voluntary participation program that provides young people with an opportunity to have a friend outside of home. We define mentoring as “a friendship aimed at encouraging and supporting young people”.

We aim to assist those young people who are the most disadvantaged in our community, however there are also young people who have very supportive homes and lives but have been referred to us due to a disability that may prevent them from having a social network of friends. Most of the young people referred to us are young men and many of them are without a positive male role model in their life.

Background

In 1998, a group of service providers working with young people came together to set up a mentoring program that could help young people avoid problems such as homelessness and unemployment. A development plan was drawn up with the help of community members and local politicians. In 1999, the Cairns City Council provided the funding to help set up the Cairns Youth Mentoring

Scheme. A local politician, the Hon Warren Entsch MP, successfully took a submission to the Department of Family and Community Services and funds to run a one-year pilot program were provided under the Family and Community Networks Initiative. The Cairns Youth Mentoring Scheme was set up as a Centacare Cairns Service and has been operational there ever since. Centacare Cairns has since partnered with Education Queensland and the Scheme continues to be funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Families, Communities and Indigenous Affairs.

Our objective is to provide mentoring services and activities to improve the level of engagement of young people with family, education, training, the workplace and the community. Our goals are to:

- » provide an ongoing mentoring program for young people between the ages of 12-21 years, who perceive they have a need related to personal issues, education, work or achievement;
- » involve the community in supporting young people; and
- » share our resources with other organisations and schools across Australia.

For young people receiving mentoring, we strive to assist them to:

- » Improve academic performance;
- » Develop better attitudes about school;
- » Enhance self-esteem and self-confidence;
- » Improve behaviour, both at home and at school;
- » Develop stronger relationships with parents, teachers and peers;
- » Improve interpersonal skills;
- » Provide first-hand exposure to the workplace;
- » Increase career awareness and ability to make vocational and educational choices;
- » Decrease the likelihood of dropping out of school; and
- » Decrease the likelihood of initiating drug and alcohol use.

Research shows that mentors also derive many benefits from their experience, including increased self-esteem; a sense of accomplishment; the creation of networks between volunteers; insights into childhood, adolescence and young adulthood; and increased patience and improved supervisory skills. So, we want to provide opportunities for mentors to:

- » Call on their life experience to support young people;
- » Increase their personal skills and self awareness levels; and
- » Relate with young people on an equal basis.

For local agencies, the CYMS provides additional support for their clients through mentoring with an adult, increases networking with other services and agencies working with youth issues, establishes new linkages between agencies, and fosters a collaborative environment between a wide range of community services.

These CYMS goals are part of the funding body's goals and program outcomes are measured by them. These include educational and employment outcomes, involvement with community and engagement with family. In addition, Centacare's mission statement defines our work:

As a community welfare service of the Catholic Diocese of Cairns, Centacare aims to strengthen the well being of our clients. We strive to offer hope and understanding to people in need, particularly to those clients who are disadvantaged or vulnerable. We offer

this service by listening actively, encouraging self empowerment, and providing practical assistance and Christian Care.

What do we do?

We find mentors and match mentors with young people who are referred through school, family, or other agencies or who self-refer.

The Scheme is a member of FNQ Volunteers¹, an organisation that assists in recruiting potential volunteers and arranges interviews. This is a great set up as it supports the Scheme in the screening process of volunteers, and our volunteers then also have the option of volunteering at other organisations and events.

We conduct reference checks of volunteers (we require two referees), the Working with Children Blue Card forms are sent off, and potential mentors participate in a training workshop. The final selection of mentors is made after the successful completion of the training workshop. We aim to equip mentors with the skills needed to provide friendship, understanding and patience in the initial mentor training and through ongoing support. Mentors are also required to sign a 'Code of Conduct' form at the Mentor Training. Doing the workshop does not necessarily guarantee that someone will become a mentor. Centacare Cairns reserves the right not to match a mentor with a young person for any reason whatsoever.

A mentoring relationship will only be successful if the mentor is committed – both to the Scheme and to the young person (the mentee). So, a mentor must commit to seeing a relationship through to the conclusion of the initial six months, or there is the risk of adding a sense of rejection to some very fragile young people.

Peter is one of our mentors. He describes himself as *“semi-retired. I've always had community interests. I'm particularly interested in seeing young people do well.”* He goes on to say that *“the youth mentoring program seemed to fit well with the interests I've had. I saw an advertisement and approached them.”* He describes his experiences:

¹ FNQ Volunteers Inc. was established to develop and strengthen volunteering in Far North Queensland for the mutual benefit of the individual and the community. FNQ Volunteers Inc. started out in a small way in 1999 as the Far North Queensland Volunteer Resource Agency. The name change came in May 2002 when the organisation became an incorporated entity. In October 2002 the agency became a registered charity: www.fnqvolunteers.org

"I've committed to half a day a week. I do a lot of the sorts of things a father would do with them – nearly all of them are fatherless. I ask for young people who are looking for that sort of thing, however my role is not as a surrogate father – it is a friendship aimed at encouraging and supporting young people. I find it's not much use taking them to the movies for example; there's no interaction, and it doesn't help with the development of a male to male relationship.

I've had three mentees so far, and two have been quite physically active. We select a list of activities to do together on Saturday mornings. They're generally of a physical nature, like bike riding, fishing, bush-walking, bird watching, canoeing, golf, ten-pin bowling for example. We usually accompany the activity with a meal: breakfast or brunch, and the parent contributes to the cost of that and we sit down and talk about the activity.

When we first meet, they're often reticent, maybe not sure if they want to go or not and you hardly get a word out of them. Once you've done a few activities with them, they're usually waiting for you to arrive and they don't stop talking 'til the day's over. They call me 'old man' or 'old Pete' – not disrespectfully, but a recognition of the difference between us. They can be unsure or cautious about what they give of themselves for two or three weeks, then the uncertainty starts to break down.

At the end, none have wanted it to end as a formal process. We can keep contact. I phone them occasionally and meet occasionally. I insist on manners, which some young people can have difficulty with. I often lead by example in this. Respect toward other people, including me – some basic rules of behaviour, without being over-bearing. "

Young people gain access to the program through self referral or referral from another agency. School guidance officers, teachers, behavioural support officers, Centacare, Youth Link, Queensland Disability Services and various other government and non-government organisations, all refer young people. Referrals are consistent due to the established relationships with these organisations. The follow up of such a referral is not formal but consists of the program co-ordinator meeting with the young person

and parent or guardian, and discussing the aims of the program, its policy and guidelines, and also getting to know the young person so that an appropriate match with a mentor can occur.

Mentors and mentees are asked to establish and maintain their relationships for a period of six months. The matching process is based on several criteria. In the first instance, matches will be gender based – males matched with males, females matched with females. Location or availability of access is also considered. If possible, matches will be made with those who live close by or, alternatively, where it is easy to find a mutually accessible meeting place. The third consideration when matching is the interests and personalities of each party. If the first and third criteria are ideal in a match, location may not be an issue, if both parties agree.

In addition to any socialising activity, the pair works on a project or activity that has the capacity to teach time management and goal setting skills. We may refer to other agencies when a mentee has complex needs beyond the scope of our training and support.

Our protocols

We have the following set of agreements and expectations:

- » Mentors and mentees will meet fortnightly for two hours at a minimum, with times and venues being lodged with the Co-ordinator.
- » It is an essential requirement of the program that the Co-ordinator is notified of any activity.
- » Meetings outside the fortnightly agreed meetings are encouraged, but the Coordinator is to be informed prior to the meeting.
- » No finances are available for activities within individual mentoring relationships.
- » Mentors and mentees are not to, under any circumstances, hold activities in the home of the mentee or mentor. Mentees and mentors can pick up or meet each other before an activity at each others' homes, but no activities are to take place at their homes.
- » Mentors are not to under any circumstances take their mentees to inappropriate venues (eg mentees are not be taken to pubs and clubs).
- » Public Liability Insurance is the responsibility of the Cairns Youth Mentoring Scheme.

- » Mentors and mentees will not speak to the media or make public comment on behalf of Centacare Cairns or CYMS without the consent of the Director of Centacare Cairns. All media enquiries should be referred to the Co-ordinator.
- » Gifts should not normally be given or received (excluding very small gifts such as flowers, chocolates etc). All gifts should be declared for registration to the Coordinator.
- » Mentors are not to lend money to mentees and are to be sensitive to the financial constraints of the mentee.
- » Mentors must possess Full Comprehensive Car Insurance if they choose to have the ability to transport the mentee. Mentors must also inform their insurer that they are volunteering with the Scheme and that their vehicle will or may be used for transporting young people to social events and CYMS activities so that their policies are endorsed by their insurer.

Naomi is 17 years old and was a mentee when she was about 15 years old. She continues to be involved in the CYMS:

"I'm working in two jobs at present, in a shop and a day-care centre, while I save to go to America to work with children as a nanny. I'm a member of the Scheme's Action group because I wanted to continue to continue to help. I have spoken on behalf of the Scheme at two big business lunches, I've advertised the Scheme on the radio, helped Anita run the celebrations held during the year, and spoken at training weekends for new mentors. "

She reflects on the Scheme's requirements:

"The six months formal time is a good length and you can remain friends afterwards. Me and Julia still see each other occasionally, for dinner or something and it's been two years. Keeping it to six months means that mentors can get to help more people too. "

Peter agrees:

"I think six months of formal contact is about right. Beyond that I think you may risk becoming a surrogate parent and it could create stresses in the family - 'good-time parent versus hard working parent'. "

Should all parties desire that the relationship continue beyond the six months of the program, this would be encouraged, however continuing support of the same magnitude cannot be offered, and the relationship then exists outside the parameters of the Scheme, though mentors and mentees in this situation are still welcome and encouraged to participate in the Scheme's activities. On the other hand, if both parties decide that they have fulfilled all aims and expectations at the end of the six months, the celebration activity will be considered the most desirable time to complete the relationship.

It is the policy of the Cairns Youth Mentoring Scheme that all mentors and mentees must participate in closure procedures when their match ends. Closure is defined as the ending of a formal matched relationship regardless of the circumstances of the match ending or whether they intend to have future contact informally beyond the match duration. The celebration is a function that is held four times a year. It celebrates the commitment that a mentor and mentee have completed. There is usually a fun activity – lately basketball, with prizes that are donated, and a BBQ.

What are the main needs of young people who participate?

Young people are referred because they would benefit from an extra support person outside of the home. They may be referred because they:

- » lack a positive female or male role model;
- » are socially isolated;
- » have a disability that prevents them from having friendships at school;
- » have behavioural issues;
- » have family issues; or
- » are in foster families – and many more reasons.

The CYMS provides support for the mentor to ensure that the relationship has good communication flow and that both the mentor and mentee enjoy their activities. At the three month mark and at the completion of the relationship, interviews are conducted where the carers, the mentee and the mentor can comment on the relationship. They are given the opportunity to evaluate the support provided by the Scheme.

What are the young people saying about their experience?

Naomi says:

"It gives you a different view on adults because, to young people, adults are usually authority figures and not your friend. Through the Scheme I've found that adults can be your friends. You can tell them things and they can take a broader view than parents or your friends. They're not as emotionally involved – not looking at things from only one viewpoint."

"My mentor was sort of 'time out' for me. We could have fun and she was still giving me good advice and listening. Mum and Dad weren't always wrong or anything, it was just a different person's opinion to think about. We did fun things together, like going to new places, shopping, bowling, a golf driving range... We shared decisions on what we would do. I was 15 at the time."

At the end of a mentoring relationship, we ask a number of questions of the young people. Responses included:

What have you learnt about yourself during the mentoring relationship?

"I don't need to be shy because I can do anything if I put my mind to it."

"I have learnt to have fun and make new friends."

"I am more confident and independent."

"I've learnt that people like a kind, nice, caring boy."

"Everyone is different and there is always someone there for you."

Have you noticed any changes in yourself since being with your mentor?

"My communication skills have increased. I can express my ideas more. I'm not moody and snapping at people anymore."

"My schoolwork has improved. And so have my social skills."

"I'm not standing back from the crowd any more and sitting by myself."

"I can communicate with adults better."

"I fight with my brothers less as we get breaks from each other."

Young people frequently comment that they made a friend. In many cases, this friendship can last years. There is one mentor who, after five years, is still in contact with her mentee. This particular mentor is always a listening ear and non-judgemental.

In the exit interviews, we seek feedback on whether young people see the Scheme as a good thing for them. Most answer yes. For example, Naomi says:

"I got along a lot better with my sister because I had that time out from her, and got on better with my Dad as well because we weren't so close. My mentor, who had the same experience when she was young, was able to understand and give advice. I'm a lot better with my Dad now. I found that my mentor was able to give me advice that was useful to me."

We gauge satisfaction from mentees and mentors and from mentees' parents/carers. This is how we determine what works and what does not work. We also have independent yearly evaluations.

Some of the issues we face:

In organising the Scheme, we have had to face up to many issues.

Time and delays impact dramatically on the flow of matches. Young people may have to wait for us to find a suitable mentor, and mentors have to wait for processing of their 'Working With Children Blue Card'.

Secondly, we must work around the limits of the policy that there must be no home visits. This is a risk management policy that protects both the mentor and the young person, however many mentors believe that this does not enable them to do projects like cooking or using tools. We have sourced other locations to provide the sorts of activities that might occur at home so the pair is not limited in their choice of activity.

Recruiting male mentors is a challenge, as women are generally more likely to be volunteers.

Communication failures between a mentor and the young person can result from something as basic as phone credits running out for the young person. But sometimes conflict resolution may be necessary and this is often a situation of mis-communication.

Finally, sustaining the program relies on funding and this relies on good relationships with funding bodies. The program needs to fundraise and apply for grants to fund essentials like mentor training. This is a strain as it takes the coordinator's attention away from the core work: matching and maintaining relationships.

What Works: Our advice to others

To set up a mentoring program, it is important that you do not reinvent the wheel. Contact the National Youth Mentoring Network ² and gather resources.

Build partnerships with stakeholders and try to secure substantial funding. Such funding is required to market and recruit volunteers. Involve young people in fundraising and advocating for the program and assisting with activities at events like program camps. Naomi explains her role: *"I'm the young persons' representative on the action group that discusses the program, raises money and promotes the program. I have plenty of opportunity to give my opinion."*

The screening process has to be comprehensive to ensure the safety of young people. The program can only be successful if referral agencies trust your organisation, otherwise you will not have any young people participate. There is good community support when agencies see the outcomes for young people as positive.

Good policy and procedures and operational support are essential in working with young people. *"The program needs to be well organised and have clear rules,"* says Naomi.

Mentoring also only works if the young person wants to be there: if she or he wants a mentor. Naomi explains why the program works for her:

"A program like this has to be centred around the young people, their needs and the benefits to them. People have got to want to be involved (both mentors

and mentees) or there's no point. The mentors are there because they want to be there and the mentee also participates voluntarily.

The mentor is there to be your friend, not to tell you what to do. For a young person, having an adult as a friend can be a little unusual. I meet a lot of mentees (and mentors) and they are mostly boys who don't show their feelings much, but they usually say (of their mentor) 'oh, he's a cool mate'.

The mentee has someone independent of family who can listen and advise It gave my family a break from me. I think Mum and Dad thought it was a safe program because it is run by Centacare through government funding and they heard by word of mouth that it was good; and they felt that I was talking to someone who would give me decent advice. "

We have also found it important to ensure that the parents or carers understand what is expected from mentors so they do not expect the mentor to do things outside of their role.

We have learnt that it is important to emphasise that mentors do not have high expectations otherwise they may be disappointed with their mentoring experience. Peter explains why the program is successful from his point of view:

"The one on one relationship is valuable. The experience is extremely rewarding for the mentor. You really do get a 'kick' out of seeing a young person grow in confidence, or return to school. You've had some positive influence on that young person through this process. You can influence their lives for the rest of their lives.

You see them grow in confidence, grow happier, become more focused about what they can do in their lives. The availability of an adult male for boys living with a single mum gives these boys another adult reference point that is not always readily available in our busier community these days. These boys don't seem to be able to walk down the street and chat with adult males about things that are important to them.

The mentoring contact of about three to four hours per week doesn't seem like much; but in the six

² For information on Youth Mentoring Network Contact Youth Mentoring Network <http://www.youthmentoring.org.au>

months of the formal program, you can pack in more contact with a male who is interested in them than the contact they may have had in the previous few years. "

As CYMS Co-ordinator, I believe that the mentoring relationship works because it is based on friendship – there are no high expectations on outcomes. However out of friendship, confidence is built, trust develops and there is learning about other perspectives.

In summary, what works for us is having **clear goals and operating procedures**, providing **training for mentors**, building in a **mid-partnership review**, basing mentoring on **the friendship model**, having someone with **conflict resolution skills**, developing **good community support**, and basing **evaluation in action research**. And, most importantly, **don't re-invent the wheel**: consult the National Youth Mentoring network.

Contact:

Prospective mentors and businesses who would like to become involved in the Scheme in any way are encouraged to contact the Co-ordinator:

The Co-ordinator

Flexible Learning Centre

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In Summary:

The Cairns Youth Mentoring Scheme in Cairns, Queensland encourages and supports socially isolated young people through mentoring. It aims to:

- » **provide an ongoing mentoring program for young people between the ages of 12-21 years, who perceive they have a need related to personal issues, education, work or achievement;**
- » **involve the community in supporting young people; and**
- » **share resources with other organisations and schools across Australia.**

Outcomes for young people have been:

- » **improved academic performance;**
- » **better attitudes about school;**
- » **enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence;**
- » **improved behaviour, both at home and at school;**
- » **stronger relationships with parents, teachers and peers;**
- » **improved interpersonal skills;**
- » **first-hand exposure to the workplace;**
- » **increased career awareness and ability to make vocational and educational choices;**

- » **decreased likelihood of dropping out of school; and**
- » **decreased likelihood of initiating drug and alcohol use.**

Key learnings from the project have been about the need to:

- » **contact the National Youth Mentoring Network and gather resources;**
- » **build partnerships with stakeholders; and**
- » **try to secure substantial funding to market and recruit volunteers.**

The project says it works because it:

- » **has clear goals and operating procedures;**
- » **provides training for mentors and has a mid-partnership review;**
- » **bases mentoring on the friendship model;**
- » **has someone with conflict resolution skills;**
- » **develops good community support;**
- » **builds in action research based evaluation; and**
- » **didn't re-invent the wheel – consulted the National Youth Mentoring network.**



Inspire Peer Mentoring Program

Between Flinders University and local Secondary Schools

What works in mentoring disengaged students

Catherine Koerner, Program Coordinator, Flinders University

The overall goal of the Inspire Mentor Program is to increase retention and participation in education for ‘at risk’ students in the southern suburbs of Adelaide. Inspire targets students at risk of disengaging from their education, including those from low socio-economic backgrounds, Indigenous students, students with disabilities, students from non-English speaking backgrounds and students who are under the Guardianship of the Minister. In particular, Inspire supports Indigenous students to complete their secondary education, enter appropriate further education or employment and, if entering University, complete their studies and progress into employment.

Our program is based on an ethos of community development and capacity building and has benefits for both the mentors and the young students. It grew out of a direct request from local schools and industry, who were both concerned about low retention rates and what that meant for local young people. It’s a partnership between the local community and the University and, at the personal level, is also a partnership between the mentor and the young person.

Mentor partnerships are negotiated between Flinders University and each school or partner organisation.

We match Flinders University students as mentors to young students at local secondary schools. By being immersed in the classroom as co-learners or as peers, the mentors bring their own study skills, knowledge, passion and interest in their subject area to their contact with students in schools or community based education programs.

Key Stages

Each mentoring partnership is tailored to meet specific needs within each school community, but there are key stages in all of them.

The first step is to introduce the concept of the program to schools and then, with participating schools, to negotiate procedures and parameters for the program. This includes, for example:

- » Identification of target groups of students and their teachers;
- » Explanations to the staff of how the program will work; and
- » Establishing guidelines for supervision and duty of care.

After the project proposal has been negotiated, the project is advertised to the Flinders University student body. Each project is also sent to targeted student groups enrolled in disciplines that match the project area.

Mentors are then matched to projects, trained by Inspire staff, and placed in contact with the school contact person (usually a Deputy Principal). Mentors then negotiate their availability with the school contact person around the school and university timetables and the mentors' paid work and family commitments.

The school conducts an orientation to the school and to the project, introducing mentors to teachers. The teachers involved then introduce the mentor to the student and class groups.

Most mentors participate for two hours each week throughout the school year. Some mentors opt to give one day (9 to 3 pm) per week if they are undertaking a project for six units credit (this requires 120 contact hours and a written reflective journal).

Janet Weir is Special Education Coordinator at Hamilton High School. She describes the main aspects of the program in the school:

"The Inspire mentor program is part of a broader package of school based mentoring initiatives, including primary to secondary transition with adult mentors and a peer support program in which Year 11 students build relationships with Year 8s. Learning needs often arise with students with disadvantage and they benefit from having a mentor, but we also have some higher achieving students placed with a mentor to boost their achievement.

I talk with the mentors about their interests and their strong subjects, and use that to match them with a student, taking into account their time availability, the student's timetable, and teachers' willingness to have a mentor involved. I brief teachers before the mentor arrives in whatever time is available.

I also check with parents and get their permission for a one to one mentoring situation.

There are 'protective behaviours' rules that must be observed, such as 'don't sit close to a student' and so on, and the teacher always has 'duty of care', not the mentor. I emphasise that the relationship is a school support role, not a personal friendship and I advise against meeting outside of school. We always emphasise that the mentor is here to help students with their work and it's serendipity if a more personal interaction occurs; even then, it's within strict boundaries. We do explain to all our mentors that if they learn of something that is a notifiable matter, they must explain to the student that they have to report it. They have to explain this to the student.

I introduce the mentor to the class teacher. We keep a roll of mentors' attendance just to keep track of what's happening and give them support. I ask the mentors to write notes about their progress, which they store in my office, and talk to me about what they are doing. Everybody talks with them and they feel valued members of the school.

We usually have about 7-10 mentors (up to 13 once). I often have trainee teacher mentors with me in classes of struggling students and they report that they learn a lot about teaching, the need to explain things well and repeatedly. The mentors often come out of it with a 'buzz'. Many experience a different culture from their own background too. Students often indicate, even indirectly, that they enjoy having a mentor.

Some of the issues we face are that we sometimes can't place mentors and sometimes mentors aren't suited to the task. There's also time to manage the program: It's too much for one person amongst everything else I'm responsible for. I stay with it because I think there are benefits for the students – not always tangible benefits, or academically measurable ones. Ben, for example, even when he was at his lowest ebb, would always come to school when Louise was coming. Since Year 11 he has stayed during his free time to meet with her and that's quite a commitment by a young man who isn't generally motivated to do well at school. "

Developing the program

As Program Coordinator, I'm not based in a Faculty, but with Central Administration, though I have a close relationship with the School of Education and other faculties at Flinders University, who have adopted Inspire as a topic, as have Social Work and Justice and Society.

We undertook consultation and background planning with schools and focus groups in the area in 2003. One reason for its success is that it was generated from the ground up and then looked for funding after that. Our first mentors were placed in schools in 2004. We were working with six schools by end of the first semester, then with 12 in the first year and now there are 40 participating schools of the 90 in the area.

We had 160 mentors in 2006. Many have graduated, so we now have to build up our numbers again in the new year and I'm recruiting students in their second year of their degree so we can have them for at least a couple of years. Many of our mentors attended local schools, were aware of the program, and may have had similar problems themselves. Some are adult entry students who have entered University after working and had similar problems when they were young.

We have discovered some key features in organising such a program.

First, we ask that mentors commit to an involvement of at least 12 months; this results in better outcomes for the participants. Their confidence grows. It pivots around the fact that the relationship has long enough to develop so the young person – particularly the group at risk of disengaging with education – can rebuild their own sense of self after experiencing many broken relationships with adults.

Secondly, while the overall goal is to increase retention and participation in education, the focus of the mentoring process is on developing the relationship and this achieves more than just better retention. It's a chance to pick up on all the other things that are making it difficult for the young person to be involved in school. I keep up with the research in the area to back up practical experience through my previous work in the youth sector. Research findings indicate that the most important aspect of mentoring relationships is the role of the mentor in building trust and a positive relationship.

Louise is a mentor who is in her fourth year of a degree in Social Work at Flinders University. She's also in her fourth year of mentoring and works part-time. She says that mentoring complements her degree well and that she has thoroughly enjoyed it and built some great relationships along the way. She extends some advice to others considering being a mentor:

"Make sure you are doing it for the right reasons. Getting credits for your studies isn't the main aim. It should be because you want to build relationships for the benefit of others."

You have to be committed to the young person. Many don't have one solid person who sticks around. There will be times you can't make it, but generally, be reliable. Keep at it, because, sometimes, for the first few sessions, it can be a bit discouraging for you when the young person is a bit negative, or worried about why they have been singled out and they can put a bit of a wall up. If you just gently persist, most times you can get through to them."

Issues of retention and 'at risk' are more complex than lack of success at school. Most of the young people involved are living in difficult family situations, some with violence, and some are under the protection of the Minister.

The mentors are in a special position of trust. However, they are not counsellors and the focus is on support and genuine interest in the young person. We give them six hours of training. While some mentors come to us after a first year of a degree in social work, having done their first practical unit and have some background in the area, we do get mentors from the full range of subject areas so they don't necessarily have skills based on relevant studies. The training emphasises that they are not a counsellor or therapist and if anything comes up that they are not equipped to handle, they should refer it to the school counsellor. The young people are often referred to us through the school counsellor who will be aware of many issues already and will be working alongside our program within the school. They are dealing with young people who have experienced a range of very difficult personal situations. We emphasise patience and to always have an approach and manner that is encouraging.

The young people enjoy this supportive relationship because they appreciate that the mentor is interested in them, is not there to counsel or do behaviour management, but to see them and relate to them in a way that's different from the paid workers or counsellors.

Janet describes how Louise's role with Ben developed over a number of years:

" Louise works with Ben who started off as a very angry low-functioning student from a deprived background. She has helped him gain some confidence with subjects and, because she has worked with him for a few years, he's able to talk with her about his social needs, what he does on the internet, etc. She can also relate to him more broadly – he doesn't have a mother figure in his life. Their relationship grew slowly over a number of years and he grew to trust her, to know she was there to help him and that he could talk to her and she would not break confidentiality. I'm sure the level of success Louise has had with Ben is also a result of her persistence. "

Louise describes the long-term mentoring relationship from her point of view:

" One year we worked on his English, and he would read aloud; he hated English but by the end of it he was quite confident with reading and stuff. Most students don't like reading out aloud anyway. I can go to the classroom, or we can go to another room to work on his Maths. I'm not very strong at Maths, but he has been explaining it to me and that helps him learn too.

Now he's in Year 12, I'm finding we talk more about social issues and issues he has at home, like barriers to his education. In his family, he's the only person who has stuck at it to Year 12. He's starting to become more independent because now he seems to have the personal resources to do that. Our relationship has built up over time; I'm someone who can listen and give support. I remember, in the first months, in Year 9, he was saying: 'end of this year I'm out of here'. I think my involvement has helped him because in his life he hasn't had many constants and because I've gone back week after week after week (there have been times when he's been suspended, but I've kept

coming back). It's been a good thing for him knowing that not everyone gives up on him. I think that's part of the agreement of being a mentor: to be there, to stick at it. You are making a commitment to the young person; but also it's being a good role model because you are showing that when you're an adult, you have to commit to things. "

The mentor is a fellow student, hence the peer aspect, even if some of our mentors are adult entry students. They don't have to know everything but can talk about how to find things out. These are skills that young people need.

Their commitment builds a reciprocal commitment in the student. We had one young person who wagged school for nine weeks but the mentor turned up at the school every week. When the young person finally returned and learned about that, she became committed too and attended school more readily.

Janet expands on some of the benefits:

" Teachers are an ageing population. For the students, this is an opportunity to relate to someone who is young. It's also an opportunity for our students to mix with academically successful young people who give them a message, just by their presence, that it's possible to go to Uni; it's possible to do things beyond their everyday cultural experience. It opens up windows to another world. Ben has met somebody who sees life differently from the way he does. Even though he is unlikely to go to Uni, he realises there is more to life than living on the dole.

It's about contact with confident, positive role models, who are young, who are doing something for someone else for free, and who are willing to help, to spend time with them and to talk about their work and their lives, if that's how the relationship develops. "

The Inspire and Yunggorendi Mentor Project Partnership

Extending on this project, Inspire has formed a partnership with the Yunggorendi First Nations Centre for Higher Education and Research at Flinders University

to provide training for all mentors including those who will support Indigenous school students (in primary and secondary schools and alternative education programs), and to link Indigenous secondary school students with the final component of the preparatory topic for new Indigenous University students at a three day cultural camp at Camp Coorong in South Australia.

The purpose of this partnership is to develop pathways into higher education for Indigenous school students who are at risk of disengaging from their education and to prepare first year Indigenous tertiary students who have accessed the Indigenous Admissions Scheme for their transition into University. This has developed into a concerted strategy to improve the level of Indigenous undergraduate enrolment from the low socio-economic areas south of the University. A special aspect of this part of our program is the 3-day 'Camp Coorong' with Ngarrindjeri elders for mentors and students (see diagram).

Directions

We are now at the point where we have to confront the question 'how do we maintain the quality?' We've set up a research project that has been tracking the mentors since the beginning of 2007. The research shows that it's the mentor who determines the longevity of the relationship and that longer term relationships produce better outcomes for the young people. This means we have to develop ways of keeping the mentors involved and working longer with the young people.

To do this, we're looking at things like:

- » Mentors' original motivation for being involved;
- » The range of experiences mentors are having;
- » What they need on the ground;
- » What keeps them involved; and
- » The quality of the support mechanisms at the school.

The mentor needs good feedback from the school. The projects that work well have a teacher involved who plans for the project, has thought about the mentoring relationship and has put things in place to help it develop, and who meets the mentor and asks about how things are going. Where that happens, we've had mentors in the same school for three years now, from Year 9 to Year 12. These mentors will be graduating at the end of the year and some may continue independently, through the

school, though most are looking for full time work.

Louise describes how she was introduced to the school as a mentor:

"At Hamilton, they got the student to show me around the school and we had an orientation with the learning support staff. The way the school organises it for mentors is very important. In one school I didn't feel welcome; they didn't seem to embrace the mentor idea. If you don't feel that you have a good working relationship with the teachers, it doesn't attract you back."

As the end of a mentoring relationship draws near, they have to work on separation; this is so even for the school holiday periods. As Ben approaches the end of Year 12, Louise notes: "I'm not really looking forward to the end of this four-year relationship, but I hope I've given him some of the skills to go on and apply those skills in his own life. He's thinking about getting an apprenticeship."

Early data from the research show that the mentors' motivations are to help the young person. While the University may regard it as a community engagement project, the mentors take a more personal view. They may have someone in their memory who stands out as having helped them – and they now want to give that to others. Or maybe there was no such person and they wished there was and they're offering that now. Louise describes her own reasons:

"I like it because it's a volunteer based program. When I'm driving to the school, I know I'm going to spend some time with this person off my own bat and the rewards are quite different from monetary rewards. I get satisfaction and fulfilment in a different way from other activities. It has actually opened up a lot of doors – a lot of opportunities for things I hadn't really expected at the start. I've been part of committees to present the program to a Minister – that was a great experience; I've been able to be involved in training other mentors."

With Ben, I have a real sense of satisfaction seeing him develop over the years. I feel proud that I think I've had a reasonable part in that development. Giving something back to the community without having to be paid is very rewarding."

Strategies for developing a long term, successful mentoring relationship

Mentors know they are committed for at least 12 months and need to be consistent and dependable. We develop some advice for establishing a successful relationship:

- » We advise them that, in the early stages, they are likely to have to take the initiative and generate topics and conversation. This might be for four or five meetings. From that point we encourage allowing the young person to take more control of how the relationship develops.
- » We talk about ways of engaging in conversation, developing relationships, establishing reasonable boundaries to avoid counselling, being friendly whilst maintaining the mentor relationship.
- » We talk about the importance of having fun together and of respecting the young person's point of view.
- » We look at dealing with possible scenarios like what to do if they run into the young person if they live in the same area; as they get older, if they run into the student they are mentoring at parties or at a pub or night club. It's a school-based mentor program, which means that all contact must occur during school hours and under supervision. But this is a small community and mentors who live in the South may well run into their students in social contexts, so how do they deal with that interaction?
- » We encourage mentors to seek help and advice of program staff.

Through our action research model, we get feedback from mentors about the training and support, about what's needed in schools, about the way mentoring relationships are set up, about what works and what doesn't. We do this through formal feedback, evaluations and informal feedback through personal communication.

Issues

The three key issues for us now are:

- » *Maintaining enough mentors:* The schools have built expectations. We lose mentors when they graduate, so we recruit and train every year. There are problems for mentors with significant external commitments

such as working part-time, having children, relying on public transport or attending University part-time.

- » *Coordination:* At a program level the optimal coordinator/mentor ratio is about 1:100. We need to find funding for another coordinator if we go above 100 mentors.
- » *School time:* At the school level, the mentor contact people would ideally have 'teacher release time' to follow up the mentors and ensure that the support structures are in place. The partner schools manage it differently at each school, but all of the mentor contact people are doing it on top of their workload without any release time. The mentor contact role needs to be written into someone's job description at each school. When the staff move on (or retire as many have), the new teaching staff come on without any information about the program, and without any expectation to continue the schools involvement with the program.

What makes it work?

Louise says that the program works because *"it links individuals within communities, partly because it's voluntary. Learning more about relationships, opening my eyes to how other people live, has helped me with my studies."* But, she says, it also works because:

- » We get training in being a mentor, training in cultural awareness, conflict in the workplace and good support from the coordinator.
- » An email mailing list gives us access to the experiences of other mentors.
- » Mentors get together every semester to meet and swap experiences.
- » We give feedback on the process and our experience through a regular 'Audit'. This gives us the opportunity to evaluate how it's going.

For Janet, the important lessons are:

- » Mentors have to feel that they belong and are valued.
- » Make sure all the legal stuff is covered, such as protective behaviours and mandatory reporting.
- » Ensure good lines of communication; mentors have to feel able to discuss problems

"If I had more time," she says, "I'd do more with the

teachers and would develop more extension material. But essentially, the program works because it is well structured. And it works because mentors are young adults who offer a different perspective. The personal qualities of mentors are extremely important.”

Most of the mentors are doing ‘caring’ courses (such as teaching or social work), and are motivated to care about others. They are volunteers willing to do something for nothing but the personal reward. While they can, in some courses, get points towards their degree, this is not significant most of the time. So the program works because it provides identifiable benefits for the mentors as well as for the students being mentored.

For the mentors it provides:

- » a stronger sense of community;
- » valuable life skills including communication, negotiation and conflict resolution skills as well as planning and time management skills;
- » interpersonal and social skills; and
- » technical and academic skills that will help them when they seek employment.

For the students being mentored, the program provides:

- » the development of a supportive relationship with a young adult or mature age student who is engaged in their own ongoing learning in order to meet their goals;
- » academic improvement, increased school attendance, and increased participation in classroom or school activities;
- » increased feelings of self-worth and self-confidence; and
- » encouragement to develop the skills required to complete their current studies in order to be eligible for the further education and training that their interest area and possible careers may require.

In summary, the key aspects of what works are:

- » Having an action research approach that gives the mentors a voice in the program’s development;
- » Having it school and learning based, which gives the two people something to work on together;
- » Having a strong relationship with the school;
- » Having students working with students; emphasising the mentoring aspect to help young people;

- » Having University students committed to their own learning and being role models;
- » Using a community development approach, by setting up space for it to happen; and
- » Inviting participating schools together on campus for a partners’ conference so they can inform and influence one another. The schools talk about their projects, young people and mentors talk about their involvement and what works for them, researchers from the University present as well; community people with an interest can attend as do representatives from the funding body.

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In Summary:

The **Inspire Peer Mentoring Program** at Flinders University in South Australia organises mentoring for disengaged students. It aims to increase retention and participation in education for at risk students in the southern suburbs of Adelaide through longer term mentoring by university students as role models.

Outcomes for young people have been greater self-confidence and awareness of options post school as well as the development of friendships.

Key learnings from the project have been that:

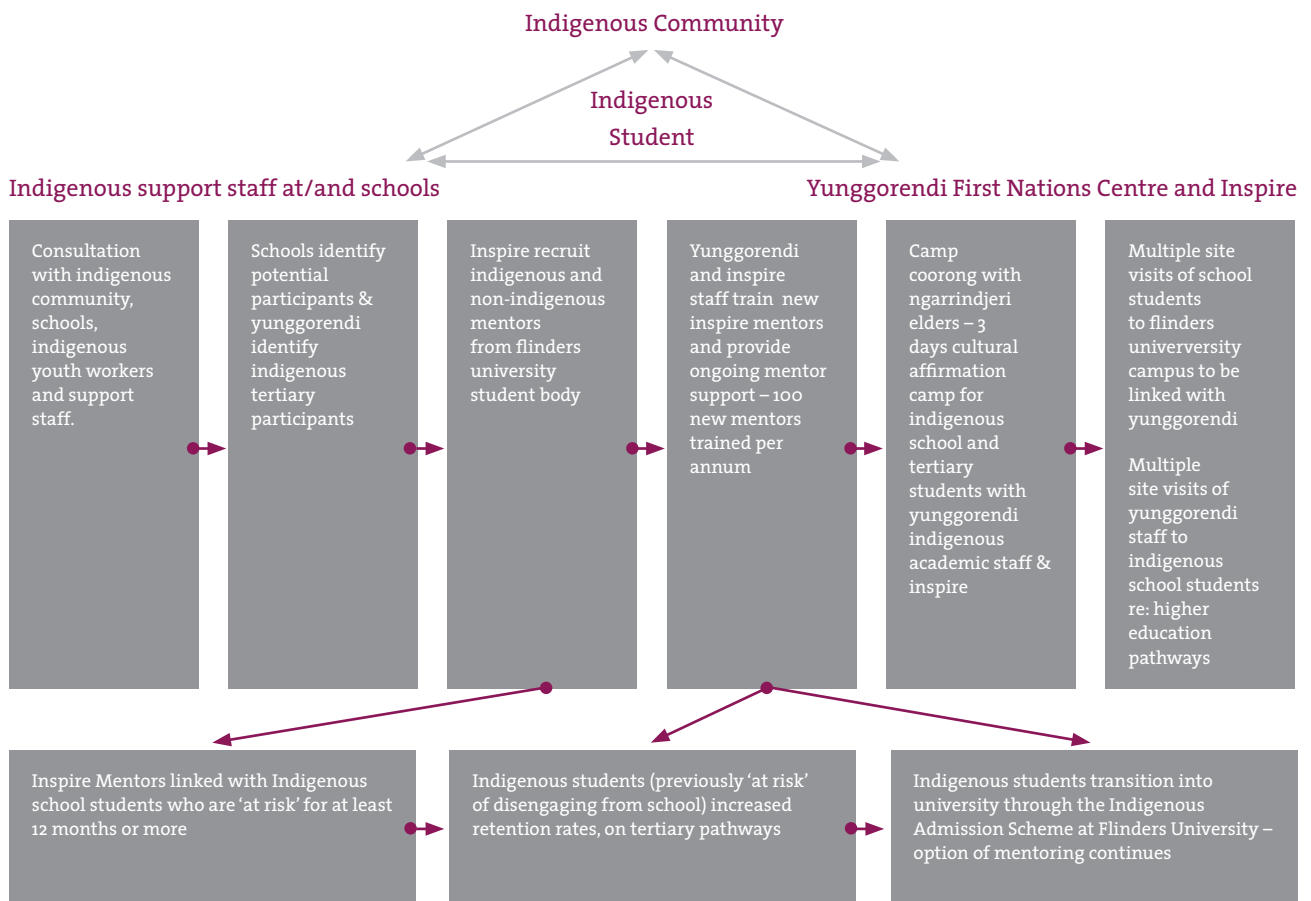
- » longer term mentoring relationships build trust and friendship;
- » University students can model futures for students;
- » training for mentors is crucial;
- » good support structures in schools are crucial;
- » volunteering is a positive social model; and

» camps and seminars disseminate learnings effectively.

The project says it **works** because it:

- » builds in an action research approach, giving the mentors a voice;
- » makes it school/learning based, giving the two people something to work on together;
- » builds a strong relationship with the school;
- » supports students working with students, emphasising the mentoring aspect to help young people;
- » involves University students who are committed to their own learning and to being role models;
- » uses a community development approach, by setting up space for it to happen; and
- » invites participating schools together on campus for a partners conference.

Inspire and Yunggorendi Mentor Project Partnership





What works in peer support in a clinical setting

The Peer Support Program at Orygen Youth Health

Bella Burns, Youth Worker, and Tereska Benich, Social Worker

with comments from Vittoria Tonin and Chris Martin, Peer Support Officers

In 2004, young people in Platform, Orygen Youth Health's youth participation program, successfully lobbied for the introduction of a peer support program for young people being admitted to the Orygen Youth Health inpatient unit. The main objective of this program is to support young people who are experiencing their first episode of mental illness within an in-patient setting. It primarily aims to help minimise the impact and to help normalise the experience. Peer support workers aim to reconnect young people with supportive peer networks and assist them coming to terms with their illness.

The success of this program was demonstrated by the 2006 external evaluation. This evaluation identified that the model had not only been valuable in training and developing the skills of young people recovering from a mental illness, but that it provided them with the ability to assist and support other young people experiencing mental illness – particularly those having their first admission to an inpatient unit.

Orygen Youth Health

Orygen Youth Health provides clinical support and services to young people between the ages of 15-24 years in the western region of Melbourne. It provides treatment for a range of mental illnesses for a period of up to two years. Orygen Youth Health also has a large research arm, which informs best practice, and this is one of its strengths. The research and clinical arms sit alongside each other.



In addition to the clinical and research services, Orygen Youth Health provides vocational services and career paths, and young people are able to do accredited courses here. We have a staff member who only works on vocational processes – to try to get young people back into school or university. It's a very holistic service, not just about getting them well, but about how they can transition back into the mainstream: school, university or workplace. It's about how we can best support them to re-develop skills and confidence – which also helps them to make a full recovery.

There are a lot of marginalised young people in the western region. They are not necessarily the easiest to access. Orygen Youth Health sees around 800 young people a year and has to turn away about 1200, which gives a sense of how many young people in the western region need help. The western region is an ever-growing corridor, with some areas doubling in population every few years; the demand for services will only increase.

The Peer Support Program

The program has the following objectives:

- » To develop and establish an effective Peer Support model for young people experiencing a serious mental illness;
- » To engage staff at Orygen Youth Health in the implementation and ongoing development of the Peer Support Program;
- » To assist in normalising the inpatient experience as well as to support inpatients to engage with their recovery process.
- » To reduce the trauma, disorientation, and boredom associated with being admitted to the Inpatient Unit (IPU).

Funding

Orygen Youth Health's clinical program is funded through the Mental Health Branch of the Department of Human Services. The research centre is funded through philanthropic organisations, and many researchers bring their own funding with them. The peer support program received a seeding grant from The Foundation for Young Australians to get the program off the ground. We were successful in receiving philanthropic funds from Toll

Racing for two years, but then decided it was time for Orygen Youth Health to support the program. It's now embedded and funded within the clinical program, though the organisation doesn't receive any government funding for it. Therefore, the program cannot expand further, and we're currently restricted in how much peer support we can provide.

Program processes

Our peer support program sits under *Platform*, which is our youth participation model. We recruit either current or discharged clients from the service. The recruitment process is a bit like going for any job – you have to apply and do an interview. We then train the young people to become peer support workers. They go through a pilot process, going out on the ward with more experienced peer support workers (shadow visits), maybe for three sessions. Once they feel comfortable with what it's like, they go out on their own, always in pairs. To begin with, a new worker will go out with a more experienced one.

Ward visits

The visits to the In-Patient Unit (IPU) occur twice a week, with two trained peer support workers being available for two hours to speak to or initiate activities with clients. They need to phone the ward in advance to check in to see if it's appropriate for them to come. They go into the ward and either involve themselves in an activity or sit with a group or one young person. They might try to engage them with an art activity, a game of basketball, or go out and have a smoke with one of them. They try to engage with whoever is willing to be involved.

Peer workers offer support but not advice. One of their key roles is to advocate on behalf of a young person who might be unhappy about something in the ward. They can help them to make a complaint to us.

Vittoria and Chris speak about the activity from the point of view of peer supporter workers. Vittoria says:

"There's a generalised purpose to change the environment. Usually people are pretty bored, so there's a social function in visiting. Sometimes you can be inspirational or provide useful information; it differs according to the session or the group or individual you are associating with. In our capacity, we often talk about healthy stress relief methods

that we've learnt to adopt. For example, I draw upon my experience with physical activity being a major positive for me – recognising the value of physical activity for mood regulation or weight gain issues associated with some medication. You've got to tackle things in the right manner, to suit the individual – being sensitive to their feelings. I prefer to emphasise the great benefits for me of the exercise. "

Chris adds:

"You have to respond to the situation. People might not want to interact, so we can start an activity and hope others will join in. We can sit down and chat about their program, how they feel, or about how their footy team's going, or play table tennis or cards. You have to be aware of the boundaries. We often take the advice of a staff member for people to talk with. "

Vittoria notes that their role varies:

"Sometimes it can be more formal, but at other times it's more informal or low key.

We have a duty of care to ensure that any information we give is productive. For example, if someone asks me what do you do when you feel bad, I draw upon my more productive behaviours that I've gained over time. One of the key functions of being a peer support officer is that we are there to be a positive influence. "

The average stay on the ward is about a week, which means that peer supporter workers are meeting new people all the time.

"When you're approaching someone new on the ward," says Chris, "it's just like any new relationship: not easy at first. When you first start in peer support, it can be hard; but now I don't find anything really hard in this role. Even when problems occur, we have routines to follow and we can call on staff. "

Peer support workers receive monthly supervision by clinical staff, to ensure they are supported. In that supervision, they can raise a whole range of issues. This is group supervision, but we can arrange one to one supervision as part of the process of becoming a peer support worker. The supporters complete a wellness plan

that consists of a contract between the social worker and the peer support worker, an information sheet on who we should contact if we think they're not travelling so well, and what they see as the indicators that we would notice if things weren't going so well for them. It's a way too, for them to say: 'I'm not travelling too well right now. I need a break from peer support work. I'll ring you when I'm ready to go back.'

We also have a contractual agreement that if, for some reason, a peer support worker is admitted to the ward themselves, then from the time they leave the inpatient unit, they need to take a break from support work for three months. We insist on this break (until there is a bit more distance again) for a range of reasons, including defining the difference between roles of patient and peer support worker. It can also become confusing for other clients on the ward. However, that's only happened once or twice in four years.

Drop in room

In addition, there is a drop-in room at Parkville – a space for clients to wait for appointments, speak to a peer support worker or access youth specific and mental health specific resources. It would be great if that was staffed all the time by a peer support worker, but currently there are peer support workers there twice a week in three two hour blocks. Case workers can arrange extra times, but it's hard to resource.

Coordination and sustainability

Vittoria and Chris coordinate the peer support program. They are responsible for managing the weekly visits: establishing the rosters, paying the peer support workers and any day-to-day issues. The coordinators are also responsible for chairing the peer support working party, which meets every three months. This peer support working party has a team member from each of the programs across the service, a staff member from the ward, a youth worker, and sometimes the clinical manager. The aim is to have representation from across the service. In that way we ensure that the program's profile continues to exist, that staff are constantly reminded of the work the peer support workers do, in order to encourage clients to use the peer support room, and that we get clinical input from staff around how we can improve the program.

Payment for peer support workers

Peer support workers get paid \$30 for a two-hour session. They also get paid if they come to a meeting, or to supervision or when they come in for training. Any time they attend in the capacity of peer support worker they get paid. That's the same for any youth participation work. The Platform team are paid for meetings and when they do public speaking, media contacts, or doing a survey (see below). It's not a huge amount, but it shows that we appreciate their expertise and time.

Outcomes of the Peer Support Program

The evaluation process within Orygen Youth Health is treated very seriously. Management is positive about what young people have to offer and usually responds to the key messages coming through evaluations. Vittoria notes:

"The youth participation aspect is taken very seriously and major aspects of the program are placed in consumers' hands – that's trust and you can clearly see evidence of the social model of health in the peer support program; there's more to it than staff dispensing medication. "

These young people appreciate the service they receive and want to put something back into the service. Vittoria observes: *"We are passionate about the place and our experience through the program was positive, so you want to 'give good'. If you do something negative, you're actually cheating the people we used to be."*

Feedback from clients, Peer Support Workers and Inpatient Unit staff indicates that peer support visits can have a significant impact on the Inpatient Unit environment. For clients, the evaluations have indicated that the outcomes are obtained from being able to spend time with another young person who understands their experience – from their own experience. Peer support workers are also able to provide clients with hope. Often you'll hear comments like: 'What was it like for you? Isn't it great that you're past that. Do you think I'll get past that too?' That's the real value of the peer support program.

As with any young people, there is a natural resistance

to authority and so the peer support programs actually allow them some time out in terms of constantly being told what to do: take this medication, come to this program. The peer support workers don't take on any of that. They are not there to tell them what they can and can't do. That real sense of someone to take them out of that environment for a while is invaluable.

Interestingly, in the evaluation report, there was a reduction in the critical incidents on the ward after the peer support program was implemented. Most of the staff report that there is an environmental change after the peer support workers have been on the ward for a shift. The ward is more socially active and more relaxed. The clients on the ward look forward to visits.

The program is also a way of keeping former clients engaged in a way in which they feel safe, and doing very productive work. The program is a way of maintaining the engagement of disadvantaged and marginalised young people – anyone who suffers a mental illness is disadvantaged.

The whole area of community and public education is important. Peer support workers often go out and talk to school groups and say: 'Look at me. Do I look different to all of you? But I have a mental health history. I come from a good family and all these things.' This is about normalising the issue that young people get mental illnesses and that we should all try to get more help.

What Works?

We think that the Orygen Youth Health Peer Support program works because of the following reasons.

Firstly, it works because it is **initiated and driven by young people**. Youth action initiated it for other young people. We have come through the program and are of a similar age, so peer to peer support breaks down barriers. We are passionate about the place and aim to give back some of the same value that we received.

Our advice is to make sure you include your consumers at all levels of the program management. We have young people who will advocate on behalf of the service and young people on the Platform team who will argue to the Department for the need for more services like this. We have many young people involved who are very

passionate about that.

Secondly, it works because **the organisation places trust in the peer support workers and supports us**. Training is provided for the peer support workers and they receive a structured introduction to the work. There is good supervision and direct support in the Ward, with a monthly supervision or review where we have the opportunity to discuss how things are going. We can advocate on behalf of clients to staff.

We all agree that a program like this really needs to be supported by management. If that's not there, it's not going to happen.

Have clearly defined frameworks to avoid problems. Share knowledge and skills to ensure that the program can continue when people leave; be open to change, and flexible so you cater best for each group of clients. Training young people needs to be taken seriously with the right processes in place to do this properly. It is important to have a mediator to assist the peer support workers if they experience trauma on the ward. It's not going to happen overnight, so there needs to be an investment in staff and resources to make it work and a commitment to finding funds to support the program.

Thirdly, it works because we try to operate in an **open minded, listening manner, and emphasise the positives**. This provides workers with a strong sense of self worth, and provides clients with good social relationships and role models.

We have learnt that people need to be really clear about why they are doing it, have really clear objectives, and also be introspective about whether their service is actually ready, including whether they've got the staff they can assign to the project. A program needs to welcome people's contributions, encourage and empower them, and be inclusive. Young people need to participate however they want to. We have a range of other activities: public speaking, media, newsletter, and advocacy. Some of these are for articulate and confident people, but there are other opportunities if you're not; if you simply want to come to a meeting, you still can.

Finally, it works because the program **builds in action research**, through *Platform*, into how we are performing. There is regular feedback from the peer support workers. Ensure that objective evaluations occur to help improve the program.

The *Platform* team implements a client satisfaction survey each year. We try both to get a general sense of what people think of the service and also try to include something around a particular theme. For example, last year, we investigated Rights and Discharge; the *Platform* team ran a focus group with targeted questions around the discharge process and also surveyed outpatient clients. From the survey we were able to find out that many clients felt the discharge process could be improved. A report was written and presented to management, and this resulted in changes to the clinical guidelines.

The second survey was into the rights of young people. It identified that young people really didn't know a lot about their rights and this led to all the staff at Orygen Youth Health undergoing some rights training. We developed a rights checklist, which case managers are expected to go through with their clients. We recognise that this is a tricky issue and one that's all about timing. When young people first come to us, they are acutely unwell and not so focused on their rights, but more on their illness. We're looking at different ways we can deliver that information at different times during their treatment here.

Our feedback mechanism is called *Speak Out*. Peer support workers often help clients to fill out *Speak Out* forms. The role of peer support workers is to act as advocates and remind young people that they do have rights while they're here, in order to help ensure clients are being treated as they are meant to be.

In summary, it works because:

- » We have full support and trust from management;
- » There are frameworks, guidelines and training for peer support workers to ensure that individuals know what parameters they are working within;
- » Peer Support workers come through the clinical program, are familiar with the system, and are of similar age to the young people in the service;
- » There is regular action research and evaluation, including monthly supervision sessions for peer support workers;
- » We try to operate in an open minded, listening manner, and emphasise the positives; and
- » We are passionate about the place; our experience through the program was positive, so we want to give value back.

Contact:

To contact Orygen Youth Health during normal business hours (9 am to 5 pm Monday to Friday), phone reception on 03 9342 2800.

In Summary:

The Peer Support Program at Orygen Youth Health in Victoria provides peer support in a clinical setting. It aims to

- » establish an effective Peer Support model for young people experiencing a serious mental illness;
- » engage staff at Orygen Youth Health in the implementation and ongoing development of the Peer Support Program;
- » assist in normalising the inpatient experience as well as to support inpatients to engage with their recovery process; and
- » reduce the trauma, disorientation, and boredom associated with being admitted to the Inpatient Unit (IPU).

Outcomes for young people have been

- » a better environment on the ward, with more social activity and diminished violent incidents;
- » clients seeing good role models; and
- » a real sense of worth and achievement for the peer support workers.

Key learnings from the project have been that:

- » peer support breaks down barriers;
- » management support is crucial;
- » good training and supervision are crucial;
- » there is a need to have clear objectives and guidelines; and
- » objective evaluations must occur to improve the program.

The project says it works because it:

- » has full support and trust from management;
- » has frameworks, guidelines and training for peer support workers to ensure individuals know what parameters they are working within;
- » involves Peer Support workers who come through the clinical program, are familiar with the system and are of similar age to the young people in the service;
- » builds in regular action research and evaluation, including monthly supervision sessions for Peer Support Workers;
- » operates in an open minded, listening manner, and emphasises the positives; and
- » involves people who are passionate about the place and our experience through the program was positive, so want to give value back.



The Y-GLAM Performing Arts Project

Moreland Community Health Service

What works in empowering same sex attracted young people

Dominique, Catherine, Jemma Mead and Danielle von der Borch

We believe that the arts are powerful media in which to engage young people, as well as providing opportunities for personal development and self-expression.

Same sex attracted and transgender young people (SSATY) have a variety of needs and interests. Some require intensive counselling services and individual support, while others require therapeutic group work and/or social groups.

Y-GLAM aims to provide SSATY with a space for socialising, networking and creative exploration. In the project, young people use the arts to express their sexuality, fears, dreams, thoughts, stories and experiences in a safe and supportive environment.

Y-GLAM is open to SSATY aged 14 to 25 years. Since its beginning in 1998, Y-GLAM has devised and performed 12 theatre works, produced a community service announcement for TV, designed an anti-homophobia postcard campaign and produced a 20-minute video. The project operates within a community cultural development framework and the young people are involved in every aspect of the project, from membership on the steering committee to directing, from script

writing to lighting, and from acting to stage managing. In 2004, Vicky Guglielmo and Jemma Mead, local community artists and youth workers of Moreland, and co-founders of Y-GLAM, received one of eight Honouring Women in Moreland Awards for Improving Social Conditions.

Y-GLAM's Goals

The gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (GLBTIQ) community still faces marginalisation and discrimination in the Australian community. This directly impacts on the experiences of SSATY. The opportunity to be involved in a community cultural development process, such as Y-GLAM, provides these young people with:

- » A sense of community and belonging;
- » A supportive environment that encourages personal development through the use of arts;
- » A supportive environment in which to navigate the path of sexuality and gender identification;
- » Access to peer and support networks, information and informed adults;

I'm **Dominique**. I'm 19. I live with my dad and my girlfriend and am studying Performance Studies in a Bachelor of Arts at Victoria University. I also work at a call centre. I am currently undertaking some research with my friend Catherine into starting up a youth group within the City of Moreland, funded by The Foundation for Young Australians. I've been at Y-GLAM for a year. I'm in a punk band and love playing and writing music. I suppose I'm passionate about being vegan, and about nutrition and food and tea. I'm also passionate about contemporary dance, sound design and visual art especially sculpture. I'm also passionate about the Victorian period.

My name is **Catherine**. I'm 18 and am currently studying at Melbourne University. I just finished my first year of an Arts degree. I live with my dad and my brother. I work at the same call centre as Dom. I've been involved with this project for four years; for the last couple of months we've been working with Moreland Community Health Service researching what young people in the area want, are passionate about and what supports they want (particularly SSA young people). I'm also passionate about the fair trade movement, so I'm in a group called 'Hooked' – which is Students for Fair Trade Justice. We work on things in the food industry, such as labour rights and the home workers' code of conduct. I'm also passionate about writing: I write a lot of fiction. I used to write for Dykonoclast, but they folded.

I'm **Jemma**. I studied drama and dance at university and Danni and I both have strong backgrounds in theatre, dance, movement and community arts. I also have a youth work background, coming to the field through the arts. I have a fair understanding of production, budgets, lighting and the practical side of theatre making. Danni's strengths are in the creative process.

I'm **Danni**. I went through the VCA drama school. I met Jemma doing a movement and dance Graduate Diploma, and since then have done a lot of my own performance work. I have also done a lot of community arts projects over the last 15 to 20 years, in a range of different settings. I believe in the transformative power of the creative arts in the lives of people and the inherent creativity in people.

- » An opportunity to learn new creative skills and develop existing ones;
- » A safe and supportive space in which to explore and express their stories, experiences, ideas and views; and
- » A chance to share their views through a creative process with the broader community in order to increase the understanding, and hopefully acceptance of SSATY and the issues they face.

Background

In 1998, CoCare (the youth health unit of the Moreland Community Health Service in Melbourne's northern suburbs) established a chat and support group for same sex attracted and transgender young people (SSATY). At that time, Vicky Guglielmo and Jemma Mead, local community artists and youth workers of Moreland, approached CoCare with an idea to establish a performing arts project to run alongside the support group, with the aim of providing a dual service delivery model for that target group. The Moreland Community Health Service supported the proposal and assisted in developing funding proposals for seeding grants. Jemma remembers:

"Vicky and I received some funding from Victoria Police. For the first year we only had two young people involved. You have to recognise with these projects that it does take a long time to get a larger number of young people coming along consistently. Especially with SSATY, you're relying on word of mouth. For young people who aren't out to anyone, it's difficult for them to find out about the group."

Entry to the program

Most young people join Y-GLAM through self referral or through word of mouth from friends. Other young people hear about it at 'Minus 18' (under 18 years SSATY dance parties), or through the GLBTIQ media where the program is advertised. Some are referred by other workers, such as through schools when the welfare coordinator or school nurse might know about the project. Because we're based at the Moreland Community Health Service, most of the young people live in the north west of Melbourne, but others come from all over Melbourne.

Catherine saw the program listed in the Moreland Community Directory. *“I had the phone number for about six months before I had the courage to ring up. I rang up and hung up lots of times.”* Dominique saw the last show in 2006. *“A friend of mine joined and said you should come too and I did.”*

The Production

The main focus for our activities is an annual theatre production developed by the participating young people. Young people wanted an active arts project, not a sit down support group. The social support comes alongside what we’re doing.

We try to encourage the young people to have ownership. They’re on the steering committee. They can also decide what role they want to have in the production: acting, writing, stage management, or design. The young people come along and talk about the messages they want to get across to the audience. Danni says:

“It’s an opportunity for young people to get their message across to the audience, to share ‘what matters to me’ and witness the transformative nature of that communication process. We want the young people to challenge themselves to do the best they can – but we provide them with skills; we don’t let them get up there without the skills.”

Through workshops starting in January, Y-GLAM develops a theme, then workshops the theme to find images and starting points, devises characters, and then, through improvisation, creates the script. We rehearse to put on the show, usually in October. It’s a chance to put a message across to an audience, which is reflective of our experience of being SSATY in the current social climate. Therefore there is a social action aspect to the project, it’s based on a community cultural development framework. Jemma points out the relevance of the stories when she says: *“We have people coming up to us after the show asking: ‘Were you in my lounge room when I came out to my mum?’ The stories reflect both the dark and the light – reflective of their experiences.”* Danni adds: *“They’re generating the material, which is really pertinent in terms of what comes out.”*

The project works in stages. We don’t audition. Young people come in with an interest in the creative arts – the performing arts – in design, technical, back stage

or performing. In the development stage, we lay the groundwork in skills: basic physical work, vocal work, improvisation, learning the language of improvisation, writing, developing as a group with a shared language. There is lots of exploration that has to happen. This is a very open-ended process to come up with a theme to carry us to the next show and help us develop our script, but we need to be in a phase where people develop and explore what really matters to them at the moment.

We do visual and spatial work, looking at pictures and images as well as movement work and improvisation inspired by the images or stories that have arisen. There is dance and movement as well as text-based work. We’ve got a whole series of workshops at the moment on each of these themes to try to generate ideas.

From that, we move into the phase of having our themes or framework – which becomes our next stage: building the show, and from that, the development of character. There’s a strong story that needs to be told and we need to find how that story will be told. Jemma notes that: *“If you’ve got ten people in the show, you’ve got ten stories that you need to work out. We don’t have lead characters, but try to have equal time on stage.”* *“It’s all their’s: the words and the decision-making processes,”* says Danni. *“Once we have developed the vision for the show, the pre-show phase starts. Our weekly rehearsals move into extended rehearsal times on Monday till 10 pm and then weekend rehearsals. We start the production phase where mentors come in to work with young people on design and pre-production. Then there’s the performance which includes the bump in, our season, then the bump out at the other end, then the let down, and a break, then back to the beginning again.”*

Jemma notes that: *“Besides putting on the shows, the work we do is really supporting the young people – not counselling, but referring them to other services as required, making sure the space is safe for them, building group agreements, core group values, making sure they feel safe and supported in this space.”*

Mentoring

An important development alongside the production is the project’s one on one mentoring work with young people. We have received funding from the Victorian Office For Youth to allow young people to work one-to-one with a professional mentor in the performing

arts field. We've been concentrating on the areas of production, design and lighting. There have been some wonderful outcomes, with one young person moving into the field professionally.

We choose the mentors carefully, which requires discussion with people about how they understand a mentor's role. Danni explains:

"We choose mentors with not only community theatre expertise but ones who've worked across a broad range of populations – people who've had experience working with young people with a range of experience and life issues. We need mentors who understand that sometimes there's stuff that happens that you have to balance against the need to get the job done. From my perspective, it is important that there is a balance between allowing the young people to have their journey, the self-efficacy to be their own person, but that at the same time the mentor would be there to help them realise their ideas so that hopefully it's a positive experience of achieving something. It's a very difficult thing; part of the learning needs to be that you fail sometimes. That's tricky territory to negotiate, but the mentors we've had have been able to build up such a positive rapport that, even at those moments, they could get back on track."

Outcomes

Achievements for the young people involved

The project points to a range of outcomes for participants. They really do achieve some dreams – this is part of the magic of theatre. Many go back to school and a lot of them want to study to be youth workers or community arts workers. Individually, they are personally empowered, gain self confidence in achieving something worthwhile and develop skills. They are able to explore issues of sexuality and gender through theatre.

Together they build a really strong sense of community and many young people are in contact with each other outside of the group. They develop trust and respect, friends and friendship networks, and a strong sense of belonging. They also make links into a broader community, gaining support and access to other services when they need these, as well as contact with role

models through the mentors: professionals in the field who they feel fine about calling. Finally, they experience having their voice heard and recognised in the broader community.

Community impact

There has been fantastic community feedback. Many people have attended every performance for the past nine years and newcomers have been enlightened and genuinely moved by the stories.

It is very important to the young people when their family members and friends are in the audience. It is particularly pertinent to those in the process of coming out to their family, who are on that very personal journey. They've got a family member there in the audience who has been incredibly moved and proud; they recognise how valuable the project has been for their child.

What works and why?

A key to the success of the Y-GLAM project is respect for the young people, their ideas and aspirations. Catherine notes:

"My reasons for being here are 30% social and 60% about making good watch-able theatre; the rest of it is all about community development. I see myself in life as being part of community development, and Y-GLAM has given me so many opportunities to do that. The foundation, conferences – that all came out of the experience and my new-found confidence of being part of Y-GLAM. It's been my intermediary between the straight community and the queer community. I didn't have the confidence to get into the queer community."

We strive for a democratic group decision-making process that allows all voices to be heard and caters for differences. Maintaining the power balance in a consensus-based process is necessary for achieving a safe and respectful environment for all involved.

Dominique suggests there is value in diversity: "Don't have one specific idea of what the project should be" and Catherine then suggests: "Let the young people be involved with deciding what the project should be about. If people don't feel like they own it they won't have the dedication or sense of ownership. Not just being given a task, but

creating their own tasks.”

Dominique also explains that: *“Once young people start losing their voice inside the project, they start losing interest in doing it.”* *“By giving young people a voice in this project you’re equipping and giving them a voice in the wider community,”* adds Catherine. *“We want ownership but we also need things like the creative aspect, the fun, and meeting people.”* Dominique says that: *“If there wasn’t the fun, if it was ‘let’s just go and do a show’, if they weren’t getting any enjoyment out of it, people would lose motivation.”* However, Catherine suggests that *“Within any group dynamic, a lot of people would come initially but two or three would do most of the work. Danni and Jemma do lots of work we don’t know about, behind the scenes. Without that, it wouldn’t get done collaboratively, it wouldn’t be fun, it wouldn’t work.”* Dominique recognises that: *“Some people are interested in the admin work and can get involved in that.”* She again points to the importance of their own decision-making in that: *“There is a certain amount of choice in what you get involved in. That motivates people.”*

Secondly, the role of experienced professionals is vital. Dominique explains that: *“Even if there is a youth worker involved as a leader, I heavily suggest that there should be someone experienced in community arts projects, working with youth and devising projects.”* Catherine adds: *“There needs to be a solid mound of arts and theatre knowledge there.”*

Thirdly, there needs to be agreement about expectations and about how people will operate. Catherine says:

“Have ground rules and don’t say: ‘Just because they’re disadvantaged youth’. Don’t have lower expectations than you would have for ‘normal’ people. There’s no point. It lowers the self-confidence of the group and allows them to lower their expectations of themselves.”

In a conversation about this issue, Dominique suggests that means that the project must: *“Have a code of conduct.”* Catherine agrees and adds: *“And get everyone to magically adhere to it.”*

Danni explains:

At the beginning of each year or project the group’s values change. We go through a review process. That’s something that happens through discussion with

whoever the current members are. We have found that it’s really useful to have a document of agreement between all of us because at times, you do need to be able to pull it out and say: ‘This was what you signed off on, so this is where you stand.’ In particular, in the pre-show stage, that means if you can’t make a rehearsal, you’ve got to let the facilitator know. Not showing up and not letting us know is not OK: that lets everyone down. Issues arise around respecting individual points of view: that everyone has their own point of view; we have to listen to each other. When we are in the pre-show stage, things get really stressful and a lot of mental health issues, and drug and alcohol issues come up and we have to manage that.

In summary, what works is when:

- » Young people own the project;
- » There is respect for the ideas and aspirations of young people involved;
- » Practical arts-based activity is the focus;
- » There is community contact and the chance to express views publicly;
- » There is support for emerging issues and appropriate referral services are available; and
- » Attention is paid to the power balance in decision making.

To contact YGLAM:

Danielle von der Borch or Jemma Mead,
Y-GLAM Performing Arts Project

Moreland Community Health Service,
21 Victoria Street Coburg
Vic 3058

(Mondays and Tuesdays)

Phone: 03 9355 9920 or

e-mail: daniellev@mchs.org.au or

jemimam@mchs.org.au

Website: www.mchs.org.au

In Summary:

The YGLAM Performing Arts Project at Moreland Community Health Service in Victoria is empowering same sex attracted young people. It aims to provide SSATY with:

- » a sense of community and belonging;
- » a supportive environment that encourages personal development through the use of arts;
- » a supportive environment in which to navigate the path of sexuality and gender identification;
- » access to peer and support networks, information and informed adults;
- » an opportunity to learn new creative skills and develop existing ones;
- » a safe and supportive space in which to explore and express their stories, experiences, ideas and views; and
- » a chance to share their views through a creative process with the broader community in order to increase the understanding and hopefully acceptance of SSATY and the issues they face.

Outcomes for young people have been

- » self confidence in terms of achieving something worthwhile;
- » personal empowerment;
- » a really strong sense of community;
- » a building of trust and respect;
- » friendship networks;
- » skills development;
- » having their voice heard and recognised in the

- broader community;
- » access to other services in the community;
- » contact with role models through the mentors.

Through theatre, they achieve some dreams and explore issues of sexuality and gender. Many go back to school and aim to be youth workers or community arts workers.

Key learnings from the project have been that:

- » providing a challenging, worthwhile project is rewarding and allows for exploration of issues in a context;
- » the mentor's role is important, so care with selection is crucial; and
- » maintaining the power balance in a consensus based process is necessary for achieving a safe and respectful environment for all involved.

The project says it works because it:

- » ensures that young people own the project;
- » respects the ideas and aspirations of young people involved;
- » has a practical arts-based activity as the focus;
- » establishes community contact and the chance to express views publicly;
- » provides support with emerging issues and makes referral services available; and
- » pays attention to the power balance in decision making.



See and Say

Disability in the Arts, Disadvantage in the Arts, Australia

What works in engaging young people with disabilities through arts projects

Liz Randolph and Gemma Craven with comments from Lewis, Sarah, Katie and Danielle

See and Say is a Western Australian youth arts project with a focus on the involvement of young people with disabilities in youth cultural activities. It represents a collaboration between a not-for-profit community cultural development organisation (DADAA), the City of Swan local government authority, and local youth centres.

Prior to the project's development in 2006, the City of Swan had seen that young people with disabilities were not accessing many services. This initiative was a response: involvement in youth cultures as a means to develop stronger peer relationships. Project participants were given the opportunity to link to Hyperfest – a major youth festival – and to have their work displayed alongside that of other young people.

The local community cultural development organisation is **DADAA** (Disability in the Arts, Disadvantage in the Arts, Australia) Inc. a not-for-profit group based in Fremantle. It has been a catalyst for the development of an inclusive approach to the arts and culture of Western Australia for more than ten years. The DADAA website outlines how DADAA offers targeted cultural development programs in over 46 Western Australian communities.

"We conduct a wide range of programs from Arts and Health, youth and ageing through to arts development, regional and mental health programs. Our focus is on creating opportunities and significant beneficial social change with people who have a disability and/or mental health issue living in local communities across Western Australia. Our arts programs offer individualised and group arts practices that assist in the development of a wide range of artistic, social and functional skills. These enhance self-confidence and enable participants to enter into activities and roles that are essential to a fulfilling, productive and participative life.

Key to the organisation's practice is the central role of the Artsworker as core to all programs. These artists fulfil the role of teacher, mentor and artistic guide. They ensure a connection and exposure with the broader artistic community.

DADAA's intent has not been focused on cultural access alone but rather aims to reflect the incredible cultural and social voice of people with disabilities

and/or mental illness, promote self advocacy through the arts and celebrate the unique perspectives of these communities.

All of the Arts Development programs have public outcomes, whether they be exhibitions, music CDs, Theatre performances or films. In this way, 'art meets the community' and the efforts of those involved are shared with a broader sphere of people, opening a dialogue and awareness in the community of people living with a disability and the art they make. "

Liz Randolph is a facilitator and *Say and See* project coordinator with DADAA. She explains the strategies used by the group:

" We focus on social inclusion strategies – assisting young people with disabilities to connect with their community through the arts. Through the See and Say project, we aim to work closely in partnership with other organisations. I have worked closely with Local Area Coordinators with the Disability Services Commission to reach young people with disabilities, letting them know that there are activities happening they can get involved in, and that there will be support for them. We have found that partnering with local youth centres is more effective than trying to work alone in the community because the staff and young people at the youth centre had some ownership of the project.

This strategy, and other community development principles, are vital to empower the community to make meaningful change beyond the life of the project. It has meant that, when young people with disabilities attend the workshops, they develop peer networks and a sense of belonging that continue after the workshops are completed.

As much as possible we've tried to allow the young people to come up with what artistic focus they want, and to allow them to drive the process. This is achieved through finding out their interests, skills and abilities, what activities they are currently doing, what they already know about the arts, and what they would like to find out.

More informally, through arts workshops, we explore

the hopes and dreams of young people and finding out what the challenges are. "

Collaborations

The current phase of Say and See is working with four youth centres within the City of Swan. We have applied for funding in collaboration with each youth centre. Each youth centres manages the funds for the project and run the workshops, which gives them ownership and understanding about working with young people with disabilities. Through the partnership, DADAA provides Liz's coordination time, and this includes making community links, connection to festivals and looking for strategies for sustaining the project long term. DADAA also provide some materials for the arts workshops and links to arts workers to run the workshops.

Participants

The participants are young people with either physical or intellectual disabilities or mental health issues. However, we work with quite a few young people who don't identify as having a disability, even where it is quite extreme and definitely don't advertise this as being a project for 'people with disabilities': the project is just a series of arts workshops for young people. We do communicate to our partners, and through subtle advertising, that there will be support at the workshops. The aim was to have half young people with disabilities and half young people without disabilities, joining together, but that doesn't always happen. We have groups with more young people with disabilities, and others with more without.

Practical workshops

Lewis and Sarah are arts workers with the project. During the sessions, the young people designed couches with super high tech gadgets: retracting speakers, sub woofas, solar powered, built in eskies. They discussed their ideas with Lewis and Sarah, who mostly encouraged them to have a go at making their ideas happen. This involved brainstorming design ideas around the table, lots of laughter and engagement – in fact, a non-traditional student-teacher relationship. They worked on pricing each of their ideas, to see if these were within the project budget. Sarah explains:

"The project we're working on is a partnership between See and Say and Whole Communities. These young people are designing couches and single seaters that we'll buy from the op shop. They will upholster them, and we'll install speakers connected to an mp3 player. If they want to make it a bigger sound system, like a car stereo, we'll let them work that out, 'cos they're more knowledgeable about that kind of technology.

So today they're designing their couches. Then we'll record them, describing what their lounge room is like. Later on we'll record them talking about who uses it, how they feel when they're there, whether they prefer to be out in the world or in their lounge room. Along the way we'll take the couches out to the street near the youth centre today, then next week down to the local shopping centre, and try it out getting people to sit on the couch and listen to the lounge stories.

In the Whole Communities project, we'll be collecting those stories from the broader community, so there will be a mixture in the final outdoor installation that we'll do. "

There is a creative energy, an enthusiasm and a wealth of ideas in the approach taken by Lewis and Sarah. They are very engaged with the young people, in an informal manner. They respond to any idea, with a facilitating attitude, leaving the young people with ownership of their projects, but coming up with lots of their own ideas. Sarah explains that she got the idea for this project from visiting an arts festival in Holland where they had op-shopped chairs with audio recordings.

How can art be effective at engaging disadvantaged young people?

Gemma Craven is a TAFE teacher, employed by Swan TAFE, but based at Swan City Youth Centre. She thinks that the project works because it's practical and hands on and is more likely to get participants working as a group. "They're more likely to engage with each other," she says.

"I guess we're offering them something that's fun to do,"

adds Lewis. "But having said that, it's hard to come up with an art project that's good enough for a wide range of young people to engage with, and obtain outcomes. Young people need to see weekly outcomes, otherwise they get lost and confused and don't know what they're doing and why." Sarah notes: "Sometimes you're not offering them a clear thing, not demanding anything from them, but offering something that's going to engage a whole lot of different processes."

Katie and Danielle are some of the young participants in this workshop. "I like painting the different types of things," says Katie and Danielle says she's: "loving it. That couch was so fun. I enjoyed designing my own couch 'cos you get to do something different."

Lewis focuses specifically on why art is an effective approach:

"Art can be a good way to make them think. On See and Say we wanted to get them to record their experience of living in Midland. It didn't have to be positive; we told them 'we just want to hear your feelings about Midland'. If we had just sat them down with a piece of paper, we wouldn't have got anything. Instead we came in with digital cameras for them to use. We blew up their photos, used digital effects on them, and used spray painting over them. It's not till the end of the project that they realise that we've gotten them to write a piece of poetry that is social documentation and personal expression. We'd gotten all that out of them because we'd used artistic processes.

But it's not just the artistic process. What's effective is that we're also taking them seriously. These kids have had it drummed into them that they're useless, by police, parents and security guards. With DADAA, an artist comes in with a fun and enjoyable art project to do, and we're interested in what they're saying. We're not judging them. For the first time, someone hasn't come along and said: 'You can't do that! "

Outcomes for the young people involved

The project is developing skills that the young people want and think are useful. Through the consultation

process, we make sure that we engage with the young people before the workshops start. We know what they have an interest in learning in the workshops.

They gain education, training and employability skills – such as developing arts skills, photographic skills, using power tools, screwing things on with nuts and bolts, music skills and other visual arts skills such as drawing, painting and clay work. In a series of workshops over 10-12 weeks, they would usually be focused in one of these areas and build up quite good skills over time. There is opportunity to take these arts skills further and move onto a TAFE course that we partner with. Lewis recounts one example:

"When I did a graf art-stencil project, one kid turned to me and said: 'Oh mate this is so fun I wish I could do this for a living'. I turned around to him and said: 'Well you could. Go to TAFE tomorrow. You're unemployed so you could probably get in for free. Do the courses they offer, get trained up and become an artist'. He was incredulous and just asked: 'Can you do that?' and I just said: 'Well look at me, what do you think I'm doing here?'"

Sarah also notes that: *"Sometimes you've started a passion with them with these projects and they've kept going. You run into them doing art projects, that's really satisfying."*

Lewis provides an example of a pathway to employment and leadership in this area: *"On the Coburn project, working with a mixed group of kids with disabilities and mainstream kids, two years ago, I had a girl participating who was doing year 12 and I'm now employing her as my support worker."* Sarah also recalls that: *"One of the artists recently fostered one of the young people we worked with. It was a slower connection made through the project. He's really talented and will make his career out of acting and circus work."*

Most of the young people who have been involved feel proud of their work and have a sense of achievement – including that they've been able to make friends, and possibly will be seen as leaders at the youth centre. People respect them and ask them to help out with stuff, so they feel important. They gain life skills through team work, develop peer networks and social and communication skills, as Sarah explains:

"While some young people participate in our programs and it leads to employment and careers in the arts, many more participants develop a network

of support. A project may connect them with artists and community support workers. Even now they run into us on the street and still feel confident to say hello. So for many young people participating in our programs, they develop a network of support outside their existing one. "

For all young people, we try to have themes in the art work that allow them to express themselves: who they are and how they feel about things. These activities develop self-esteem and confidence, enhancing status and inclusion in the community. This particularly occurs through seeing your work framed and on a wall in an exhibition or having an audience. That can increase people's general well-being, though that is very hard to measure.

On a broader scale, because we've linked with Hyperfest, there is increased visibility of young people of all abilities working together and producing high quality artistic outcomes. It's important to acknowledge that the art created is of value. If you have experienced art workers on the project, you can produce high quality and cutting edge artistic outcomes. They can facilitate that occurring in the workshop, through the conceptual idea of the outcomes, techniques and processes.

We know that the programs reduce marginalisation and disadvantage. The connection that has been made with a youth centre; young people with disabilities feel comfortable to access those youth centres. We also know that young people without a disability also develop tolerance and acceptance, and that they are welcoming and understanding of their peers with disabilities. Lewis explains that the project processes are empowering participants without them even knowing they're being empowered:

"Today as they were pushing a hot pink couch around town, they came out of themselves. They were chatting with members of the community. We could develop what happened today into a loosely scripted performance piece, give them a go and then let them tweak it."

The highlight of the project, last year, was during the exhibition in a local reasonably professional gallery. There was a really good mix of young people there – with and without disabilities. They had many friends there who were dancing and talking together – a really inclusive environment. "

What works?

The project tells us that these are important elements:

Strong, effective partnerships: The project has a steering committee with representatives from all youth services, local government, DADAA and the Disability Services Commission. We can discuss strategic things, what's working in each centre, what's not and why.

Planning and consulting with young people: We are finding out how young people want to do things, which links into youth ownership of the project. It's vital that this takes young people seriously and doesn't shut off ideas.

Using art to increase social inclusion: We are putting in place strategies for the sustainability of social inclusion: training within each organisation, modelling good practice, involving workers in good practice, developing and maintaining networks between the youth and disability sector. The social inclusion goal is just as important as the artistic goals. If the young people are involved in their youth centre, it doesn't matter if it's an arts project or not, but the arts provide a really good starting point to elicit those interactions.

Using art as a catalyst: It's a hands-on active involvement process that gives people an opportunity to express themselves and their emotions, in a variety of ways. It doesn't necessarily depend on individual ability to create art work. You can start at the observing level and move slowly into it. You can do it individually or as part of a team. Every outcome can be valued, and seen as an achievement.

In summary, **build a strong working partnerships between key organisations, employ art facilitators with appropriate qualifications and experience, involve young people in the planning, work at building self-esteem and confidence, involve the community and develop art activities that encourage self-expression** and that bring people together.

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In Summary:

SEE and Say at Disability in the Arts, Disadvantage in the Arts (DADAA) in Fremantle, Western Australia is engaging disadvantaged young people with disabilities through the arts. It aims to:

- » provide a supportive environment to foster artistic growth and empower people through the arts;
- » provide people with a disability or a mental illness access to the arts and a means of cultural contribution to their community and for themselves;
- » develop skills and artistic and creative direction; and
- » create public outcomes in the form of an ongoing exhibition program, public performances, publications, music cds, interventions or films.

Outcomes for young people have been

- » education, training, employability skills, life skills, self-esteem and confidence, and empowerment;
- » peer networks;
- » access to youth centres;
- » satisfaction in seeing their work have an audience; and
- » social inclusion and connection with community.
- » Key learnings from the project have been that:
- » the arts worker is crucial to the success of programs and can facilitate quality outcomes;
- » partnering with youth centres is important;
- » combining practical, hands on activities with fun and with both short term and long term outcomes is important;
- » activities need to engage with a variety of processes; and
- » art is a catalyst.

The project says it works because it:

- » establishes strong working partnerships between key organisations;
- » employs art facilitators with appropriate qualifications and experience;
- » involves young people in the planning;
- » works at building self-esteem and confidence;
- » involves the community; and
- » bases initiatives in art activities that encourage self-expression and bring people together.



Tuggeranong Arts Centre

The Messengers Program

Tuggeranong Arts Centre's multiple award-winning Messengers Program has operated since 2000. The Messengers Program works with every ACT Government high school and many private high schools to promote youth resilience through art, drama, dance, film and writing workshops. Since it began, the Messengers Program has provided support through arts workshops to over 1000 young people in the ACT, and reached over 2000 young people and high school students through its school performances.

Tuggeranong Arts Centre

The Messengers Program

Messengers Centre-based workshops

Participants work with artists, professional tutors and members of their peer groups to create work which is relevant to them. Over 80 participants per semester ranging from 13 to 16 years are referred to the program by school counsellors. These young people are regarded as being 'at risk' of social isolation and/or suffering depression. During school hours, the participants spend two hours per week in groups of up to 15 in arts activities based at three community centres located in the Canberra Theatre Centre, at the Belconnen Community Centre, and at the Tuggeranong Arts Centre. There are art and drama tutors, youth workers and youth mentors at each centre. The location of the Centres is important so that young people can easily and safely access them.

Messengers Outreach projects

Tuggeranong Arts Centre's Messengers Program also coordinates a dynamic outreach program where young actors develop theatre performances which travel to schools. The troupe of 10-15 young people rehearse for at least two hours per week and perform plays and present forums for high school students throughout Canberra. The Outreach Troupe also participates in partnership youth projects and events. The performance themes include: family breakdown, bullying, isolation, relationship issues, binge drinking, body image issues and 'party safe' behaviour. This program reached an audience of about 1200 young people in schools during 2007. The Outreach program is based at Tuggeranong Arts Centre. The Messengers Program also coordinates exhibitions, film screenings and publications, and often works in partnership with other organisations.

The aims of the Centre based workshops are to:

- » Enhance the resilience of young people by encouraging them to express themselves and develop coping strategies through art based activities
- » Facilitate whole group activities for self-expression and confidence building
- » Provide expert tuition in art and drama
- » Provide counselling support
- » Celebrate achievements through small scale performances and exhibitions

The aims of the Outreach program are to:

- » Enhance the resilience of young people by encouraging them to express themselves and develop coping strategies through art based activities
- » Inspire young people, parents, teachers and students to consider and discuss youth issues through theatre performances and forums presented in schools with themes of building resilience.
- » Develop performance and script development skills
- » Create works of art that reflect youth thinking on issues that are of relevance and importance to them

The value of arts activities for young people is well documented:

Evol McLeod, Director TAC:

" We are providing a creative and safe space for those young people who are at the lower end of the clinical spectrum; but may be at the point of disengagement from school, feeling social isolation, may have been bullied, or experiencing family breakdown or peer pressure that creates lots of self esteem issues for them. Through drama, writing, art, sometimes film, sometimes dance, sometimes computer graphics there is a creative engagement that I gather can now be neurologically measured in terms of what the brain is actually doing at the time of that engagement. Through our observations of the young people in the program, we think the creative activities are particularly encouraging higher self-esteem and greater social connectedness.

We have an end of semester presentation for parents, friends, school and they take it very seriously. It may be drama presentations in the theatre, an art exhibition in our gallery, or a creative writing publication.

Involvement in the arts gives young people a greater sense of confidence in expressing themselves and becoming more articulate. We have many times observed the transformational qualities of this form of practice. It's that absolute focus on the act of creating, the absorption, that can also help with coping with information overload, the speed of information transmission, the short grab of modern media. It's a luxury to have a couple of hours just working quietly. The young people have access to a team of people: the Manager, Youth Worker, Counsellor, and the arts tutors. In addition, the program employs youth mentors who are just that little bit older, yet young enough to engage with the participants at an appropriate level. "

Commenting on the value of the program as a whole, staff highlighted the following aspects:

Dianna Nixon, Manager:

" We offer an alternate peer group. It becomes an important peer group for participants and is an important part of drama/art activities, particularly for young people who may feel a little different from the others at school...they may have a different way of thinking about the world, or have different talents or skills or they just feel odd, or have so much to say and nobody else allows them to say it. So coming into a group like this gives them a new peer group and one with which they may have more in common. "

Marc Robertson, Youth Mentor agrees:

" When I first joined, I didn't have many friends and found more like-minded, creative, (people) with different attitudes to things, people who understood my sense of humour and I could understand theirs, people with lots of ideas as well. "

Mariane Asch, Youth Worker:

"I can put myself in the participants' shoes when I think back to my school days when I was inclined to a different way of thinking. And I see these young people - once they've been in Messengers for a while, adapting to each others' personalities - it's quite healthy."

How it works – Centre-based workshops:

Mariane works on the Centre-based workshops as a youth worker and art tutor:

"At each centre, we start with drama warm-up games and exercises with the whole group - then we divide into drama or art sub groups. The shy participants make an effort because it's a warm, welcoming, healthy environment for them."

Adam Hadley, Drama Tutor:

"We usually begin with games, focussing on making a lot of noise, breaking down the barriers and the teenage thing of how you look – being a bit silly really. Then we do improvisation work, based on quick thinking and being able to share themes. And in the longer term, we devise short plays for presentation at the end of each semester. We try to make it as unlike school as possible; but I do have strong expectations about commitment, avoiding put-down behaviours, being a respectful audience to support one another and making the activity work safely: both physically and psychologically."

The key outcomes of these activities are to empower the participants to create their own characters and scenes. When you're creating a scene on the spot with another person, you're no longer just an individual; you're part of a group. I find it helps the participants to find a balance between themselves and the other; not being precious, giving the other person time."

Marc comments on his Mentor role:

"I'm someone between tutor and kids, someone closer to their age they can talk to, someone to help out

the tutors by participating in activities; just being a "cool" role model!"

Stewart:

"The mentor enlarges the peer group and provides a sensitive ear and voice in the group."

Mariane:

"We have Counselling support for the participants and for the staff."

Young participants - Saskia, Wayne and Student D value the Centres' activities because, not only is it a break from school routines, it's a place where everyone feels part of the group and feels that they can express themselves and make friends easily."

Saskia:

"I feel I can do the art that I want to do, rather than what the teacher thinks I should do."

Student D:

"I feel honoured that people wanted some of my pieces shown at the end of semester presentation."

Wayne:

"Everyone here is open-minded and happy with themselves; there's no need to lie about yourself to make friends."

How it works in the Outreach projects:

Dianna:

"The young people who get involved in Outreach can be introduced by friends but usually come through the Centre-based work. Having found that they enjoy drama work, it allows them to develop themselves, develop their thoughts, and express themselves in ways they can't in other environments. The work the group does is youth-issues based. We work

from writing and other materials produced by the young people and playbuild, producing a script on a topic that is relevant to them. It's a safe, structured environment where we can discuss some quite full on issues. They often want to talk about the more hard-core issues like suicide, so we have to keep things within reasonable bounds. On one playbuilding process, we brought in the Executive Officer of MIEACT (Mental Illness Education ACT) to talk to the troupe about why we don't discuss suicide in explicit terms and why we address these sorts of issues in very particular ways. Our staff participates in professional development and training (with programs such as Mind Matters) to ensure we are in line with current practice in all these areas. "

We have developed strict guidelines to inform our practice. These include:

- » Emphasising safe practice, and creating a safe working environment for all participants & staff
- » Ensuring resilience-building activities are sourced from recognised authorities
- » Avoiding strategies that raise knowledge of self-harm activities
- » Communicating clearly with parents, teachers, school counsellors, funding bodies and other interested parties about program processes

So, within these boundaries, we can sit down and have a strong and passionate discussion from the young people's point of view. Our work is informed by current practice in the arts, education and youth work; but Messengers is not primarily a counselling service, it is an arts program whose focus is building resilience in young people.

Stewart:

" We have to consider our audience and ask what is our message and is it healthy to pass on, is it positive? "

Dianna:

" And essentially it should always be positive. Drama should always be made with a sense of hope. I always want to offer people the best of human nature. The young people here are very creative. Their problems

in school often stem from this difference. Sometimes that different way of thinking separates you from everyone else and you feel so isolated and a lot of artists can relate to this. You need to be in an environment where your ideas are valued and you can think on all those levels and not be negatively typecast. In the playbuilding and performance process we talk a lot about the issues - 'what does this mean if this happens to you? How do you handle it, How do you resolve it, where do you go for help on this? "

Marc:

" An example is the forum drama "Bully for You" – in creating it we presented our own perspectives on the issues of bullying and to do that we did background research on the web for example, finding information and advice to pass on in addition to giving our own personal perspectives on the topic. "

Dianna:

" Public outreach is a key aspect of what we do. We create works that we then take out into schools, and these performances in turn facilitate discussion within the school. It's the young people in Messengers who are the voices, not professional actors as with other groups. The young people involved volunteer their time. In some cases they receive credits towards their school work. So these young voices go into schools and facilitate other young people and teachers being able to talk about the issues raised. For example, we present a short play then split the audience into small groups - with one of the Messengers cast working with each group to help facilitate discussion, and therefore help the teachers build awareness amongst their students of the issues.

Last year Messengers partnered with MIEACT in the creation of a play based on two books MIEACT had published which featured the writings by young people on body image issues. This year an outreach visual art project is taking place in Gungahlin, in partnership with the local youth centre, and which will culminate in a public art installation. "

How long do groups last?

Dianna:

"Some people grow out of the program and move on, others will come in and it's necessary to be flexible enough to allow that to happen. Some participants have stayed for a number of years. One of our youth mentors was a participant in the program and is now employed by the program."

Some of the issues and difficulties we face:

- » You have to be enormously flexible and be able to manage a lot of stress and not project it out onto the participants or your colleagues.
- » Achieving an adequate funding level in order to meet demand and to provide stability for the program – particularly when currently all staff are either part time, or casual.
- » The variety and unpredictability of group dynamics.
- » Managing your own well-being within a sometimes difficult environment.

WHAT WORKS: a summary

- » Having a team with diverse skills – combining visual and performing arts, education, youth work and clinical psychology
- » Ability to conduct strong and meaningful discussions, in a safe environment, guided by the expertise of our group leaders who can bring in specialists to tackle particular issues or to work one-on-one with an individual
- » Solid structure and well-informed guidelines for good practice
- » Fostering in young people a strong sense of their capacity to contribute to decisions and the creative process
- » Flexible approaches to the work

Article compiled from input contributed by:

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Radio Reconnect

What works in a community development project through radio

Through the voices of Ben Nahmani and Fiona Richardson
with comments from Nicole, Ellyn and Melissa

Radio Reconnect was a unique community development project based in the Huon Valley in Tasmania, which brought together parents, young people and other community members to produce a radio play.

The genesis of *Radio Reconnect* is described by Ben Nahmani, a social worker in the region who has been with the Colony 47 Reconnect Program for three years.

*"Reconnect is all about strengthening and supporting families and communities. In my role here, I work with parents and young people where there is a risk of homelessness due to conflict in the relationship. So there's a lot of one to one and family counselling but we also have the capacity to do community development and that's how we came to be involved in the **Radio Reconnect** project. I also have a special interest in community arts programs to support my work. This project involved young people, parents and community members in writing and producing a radio drama for broadcast on the local radio station.*

We learnt a lot by doing this project and we'll develop these lessons in future community development approaches in this area – maybe doing other

art-related projects. We'd like to share what we learnt with you, but first, some background and information on what led us to this approach. "

Fiona Richardson is the Huon Valley Council Youth Arts Officer.

"I work with young people and with local businesses and other agencies on projects for young people. I'm also a practicing artist and doing a full-time visual arts degree at the University of Tasmania, School of Art.

*The Huon valley is a large area, with four main community centres that are fairly isolated from one another – and isolated from public transport. Many people suffer poverty and intergenerational poverty. Historically, there have been four groups of communities, originally based around religions, then sport; there used to be four separate local Councils that have been amalgamated. So there's a history of not being very tolerant of people from other regions. Within this area, the *Radio Reconnect* project was based in Geeveston and linked to the local radio station. "*

Ben adds:

"We worked with a number of local groups to set up the project: the Department of Human Services through the local Community Health Centre, Community Welfare, local doctors, the local community radio station and the Neighbourhood House. Some people were directly involved in the project, and others were part of a steering committee that assisted us to frame the project before we began. We worked in partnership with the Huon Valley Council's Youth Services who were supportive, with Geeveston High School, and with social workers and guidance officers. All of these people or organisations had the opportunity to refer students. The project was jointly funded through Colony 47 Reconnect and the Huon Valley Council."

The delivery of the project started in 2007, following about 10 months' consultation and preparation in 2006.

Project Aims

Colony 47 Reconnect's primary intention was to strengthen relationships between young people and their parents. "Part of our brief," says Ben, "is also to connect young people with education and the community."

For Council's Youth Services, reports Fiona, it was an opportunity to build on previous and ongoing creative activities with young people, offering them the opportunity to work with more senior community members. The project was called 'Radio Reconnect' because it was also seen as a chance for more young people to re-connect with a local radio station that was originally funded as a youth radio station.

Fiona also points out that it is probably constructive to see the *Radio Reconnect* project in the broader context of Huon Valley Youth Arts support programs, so that its short term outcomes are considered in the longer term aims of support for young people and their families:

"Our youth arts projects are about engaging young people in creative activities that they want to do, and that are relevant to them. But it is also about young people acquiring new skills in communication, in creative pursuits and also in areas like maths and design – and all allowing the raising of self esteem amongst participants. We try to take a holistic

approach: if you are allowed to be creative, you can have a better appreciation of yourself, of the world and of how you fit into the world. The benefits might not be fully evident in the short term. I see it as inter-generational; their experiences are going to affect their relationships long term.

Most of the young people I work with are at risk and are disengaged from the education system in one way or another. They need different ways of learning and achieving. The arts projects can give them a sense of achieving something, feeling good about finishing something and working with other people in a cohesive, friendly environment, rather than feeling as if they are always a failure. Quite often they feel empowered and return to their studies with a new vigour."

To attract people to the project, they advertised in many of the local media outlets: community gazettes, newsletters, the radio station, and the local newspaper. Ben adds:

"Through the consultation process, many local service providers knew about the project. And because Fiona has worked in the valley for so long she was able to let many people know directly about the project. Our advertising didn't target particular groups, but we advertised for young people between 12 and 18 and for parents and other community members. With service providers, we explained that the project aimed to work with young people and families with a risk of homelessness or young people who had left home already. We ended up with a mixed group, including families where there was no risk of homelessness and others with quite significant issues. We observed that, where difficulties were present within families, the parents didn't attend and the kids didn't want them there."

Nicole is a student who is boarding at Springvale Hostel in Newtown. She's 18 years of age and has been involved in numerous activities run by the Huon Council, including Radio Reconnect.

"I'm interested in helping people in the community – I was a teacher's aide last year at Geeveston High. I'm interested in helping people with disabilities and I'm very keen on getting good marks at school.

Because I'd already done things with Fiona through the Council, she asked me if I was interested in the radio project. I travelled a couple of hours each day by buses from Newtown to Geeveston to join in the program and Fiona drove me back. "

Ellyn is also a student, 14 years old, and enjoys "writing, being creative and living my life in the far south of Tasmania. Besides being myself, I'd like to be a writer. I first heard about the project in the 'Bush Telegraph' (a local newsletter) and Mum asked me if I'd like to be involved and we made the decision together to give it a go."

How did the project work?

Ben describes how they got the project started:

"We started with a 'get to know you' barbeque and outlined our aims with all those who attended. People knew from the start that we wanted to produce a radio play together.

We had a playwright, Finegan Kruckemeyer, who has done many community arts programs around Australia and had worked with Fiona before, so he had a pretty good rapport with many of the young people involved in the project. He ran the project for us. We had a local worker from the radio station who dealt with the recording and editing of the material. We had Fiona, who is an artist and the Community Youth Arts officer. And we had about ten young people, including two parent/child groups and a brother and sister, plus two older people who are volunteers with the radio station. "

Fiona's primary roles in the project were to gather as many people as possible and to help them remain engaged in the project from day to day.

"We also provided good quality food because, if people are going to work, they need some reward and the sharing of food enhances the occasion: when you eat together, you also talk and interact – about anything, but also about the project. I concentrated on facilitating contact between the project and the young participants, providing transport when needed and communication between partners such as Huon FM Radio, the Neighbourhood House coordinator and parents not attending the workshops. "

The early sessions were mainly interactive theatre games which required young people and adults to interact. "It was beautiful to see," says Fiona. "There was a lot of story telling. Finn developed activities where people got to speak about their lives."

Melissa is a parent of one of the young participants in the project, She remembers that: "It was a good way to 'break the ice'; we met a lot of different people."

Similarly, Nicole says:

"I enjoy expressing myself through drama and script writing. I'd already done some drama with Finegan before so it was good meeting up with him again. It helped me to learn more about myself; we talked about our families and difficulties we had. We talked about everyday things. For me, there are things I connected to and different people got different things out of it. When I was involved in the project I was going through some tough times and it helped me not think about them. I had fun, rather than just thinking about the things that were bothering me. "

Ellyn describes "creative games that you wouldn't normally expect to do; they were so embarrassing; but you soon realised you looked just as stupid as everyone else in the room... that worked very well."

Then all participants invented characters that appealed to them.

"We worked in groups to write a character," says Ellyn. "Mum and I were one group and our character was Lisa Harrow who was a clairvoyant."

"There was a ghost of a four year old boy who came back and started talking to Kieran Dodgyboots, a famous rock star – the character that Ben and I came up with," adds Nicole. "Kieren's hairdresser was also in it, and a comedian."

A story was negotiated that involved the characters and developed out of their personalities and their relationships. There was a lot of good-natured arguing in favour of characters and their right to feature in the story. Ellyn describes the process:

"We were given some homework to write about how these characters got involved with each other and the group discussed these suggestions to develop

the story – that was fun. If criticisms were made, they were done to be helpful, not to put down ideas. When two characters interacted, the two groups got together to develop that interaction. We started completely from scratch, developed these characters and then figured out a way they could interact with each other. There was no theme provided at all; the story developed out of the characters, which I think is a good way to go about it. "

Once the characters were finished, their interactions devised and the story line developed, the play was written up by Finegan and the group was ready to record the play at the radio station studio. Scenes were recorded when participants were available. Ben notes that it was good to see young people who knew one another in other, sometimes less friendly contexts, actually cooperating and working together.

The play was recorded but the group was finally unable to finish the editing as they lost the technical support person. Fiona and Ben are aiming to edit the play soon so that the group can have a sense of completion and enjoy the end product – probably at a celebratory barbeque.

What were this project's outcomes?

There were tangible benefits for all involved. The radio station benefited from having more people involved there, but Fiona says that, when she thinks of the benefits, she thinks about how the individuals benefited.

" The older radio volunteers found a creative outlet and, while they didn't have children there, they relived some of their own parent/child relationships through discussions with the young people.

A shy young woman was able to relate to other young people and got a lot out of the activity, including learning more about writing, how to develop and write for characters and this will probably benefit her schoolwork.

The brother and sister were from a fairly dysfunctional family who were suspicious of welfare, youth and family services, but ended up benefiting from the activity. I was able to make good contact with the mother who is now comfortable with

contacting me and our family liaison officer. The sister benefited from plenty of positive reinforcement and also just from being in the recording booth with someone she may not have got on with before. Her young brother got to work in the radio station, a place he wouldn't have otherwise been allowed in. A lot of the young people involved come from Geeveston and have a lot of unresolved social history with each other; the project dealt with this really well.

Nicole derived a lot of benefit, from working again with Finegan and making personal achievements through the activity. She has had a pretty hard time at school and at home and she was able to bring a lot of that out and it contributed to some of the characters in the play.

Two young women were able to talk about their Aboriginality and felt supported in doing so.

The parent/child dyads benefited from working and achieving creative outcomes together and also from being able to relate to others in the group.

The group developed a good level of trust and people were able to talk frankly about themselves and their lives.

So while the project may not have clearly achieved all of the aims that Ben and I set out with, many of the participants derived a range of benefits for themselves. "

Two young participants and a parent see direct benefits for the participants. Nicole says: *"The kids had a chance to say how they wanted things to be in (the play) rather than adults making the decisions for them. For some people it was a chance to express themselves about things that were important to them."* Melissa, a parent participant, adds:

"Once trust had been established in the group, there were times when you'd understand what another kid's life was like. Some had a number of negative things in their life and were struggling through. I could see that this project was bringing them out of their shell a bit more and letting them interact on a different level without having to survive at school or home or whatever. It lifted everyone; we all had

fun together. The way it was done was fabulous. Finegan and Fiona and Ben got us into it and made the different stages of writing and producing a radio play easy. "

While the project may not have overtly examined family relationships in a focussed way, it certainly made other beneficial gains for the participants. Ellyn talks about relationships: *"For me, it wasn't so much how I relate to my mum, but it helped me relate with other people better; I felt less shy. The activities brought everyone together, laughing at one another; Finegan handled that really well."*

Ben also notes that he was a little disappointed that the project had only two parents attend. *"However,"* he says, *"if there's a space where young people can participate, let off steam, achieve something and connect with other people in the community, it's possible that this assists with their home relationships. If we go ahead with another project in 2008, we could have some of the same young people involved again."*

What was learned from the project?

The participants have advice for similar projects. Nicole suggests: *"Plan it well but make sure every person's opinion is valid; include everybody."* Ellyn says: *"Don't start with too many rules or restrictions, but let people work those out. You need a leader who can work that way."*

In looking back at their experience, Fiona thinks that *"the focus on writing a radio play wasn't generally attractive to a lot of young people and I'd like to take a different track in our next project."*

Ben suggests that the objectives could have been met if they had structured the project slightly differently.

"In my report of the project, I mentioned that we might have been a little more directive about the content we wished to explore. We left that up to the participants and the radio play doesn't deal with family relationships. Perhaps if we had been more directive about that, we could have explored what it means to be in a relationship with parents, or with young people; we could have explored issues that

impact on the parent/teen relationship and bring that into the play, so even without parents there, young people could have been reflecting on those relationships. Our intention, through the experience of producing a play, was for family members to develop their relationship through the process of working together. In the family groups that were present, you could see that happening; but it is more complex and more difficult with teenagers and their parents than with younger children.

There's a tension between giving young people ownership of the project and pursuing our brief, which is to work with families on these issues in the most respectful way possible. I think if we come into it with the themes and give the young people the opportunity and the skills to give their own form to that subject matter, they will have a sense of ownership over it. "

What's the next step?

Ben and Fiona now say:

"We are considering building on previous successes through the possibility of making our next project a community mosaic in a central part of town and perhaps giving the mosaic the theme of family relationships, with drama games and discussions first to draw out the themes. "

What works

In summary, what works here is:

- » A focus on the interests of young people and their needs;
- » It has to be something they really want to do;
- » Involve young people in the planning and structuring of activities;
- » Don't impose too rigid a structure, but allow activities to take unintended directions;
- » Involve older community members where possible to expand experience; and
- » Provide support structures such as access, transport, food and counselling as appropriate.

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In Summary:

Radio Reconnect, in the Huon Valley in Tasmania is a community development project through radio. It aims to:

- » explore the challenges of relationships between young people and their parents and to strengthen those relationships;
- » provide recreational opportunities and connect young people with education and the community;
- » produce a high quality radio play; and
- » build on previous creative activities with community members, particularly young people.

Outcomes for young people have been a chance to relate to others in a creative activity, working productively with adults and having their opinions and ideas respected.

Key learnings from the project have been that:

- » the parent/child dyads benefited from working together and achieving creative outcomes together and also from being able to relate to others in the group;
- » the group developed a good level of trust and people were able to talk frankly about themselves and their lives;
- » while the project may not have clearly achieved all of its aims, many of the participants derived a range of benefits for themselves; and
- » the focus on writing a radio play wasn't generally attractive to a lot of young people.

The project says it **works** because it:

- » focuses on the interests of young people and their needs;
- » is something young people really want to do;
- » involves young people in the planning and structuring of activities;
- » doesn't impose too rigid a structure, but allows activities to take unintended directions;
- » involves older community members where possible to expand experience; and
- » provides support structures: access, transport, food, counselling as appropriate.



Transport, Safety and Social Centre

What works in providing services for geographically isolated young people

Eurobodalla Youth Transport Project and Narooma Youth Café

Kim Bush, Youth and Family Officer, and Angela McMillan, Youth Café Supervisor, Eurobodalla Shire Council

Access to safe transport for young people in our district was one of the five top priorities identified by Council in 2004. In response, the target group for this project has been young people who living in our shire in New South Wales, but who are far enough away from town to need transport to gain access to the café and to get a safe ride home.

So this story isn't just about transport; it's also about a youth café for local young people aged 12 to 17 years. It's about coordination of the transport project with the café to ensure efficient and proper use of the service. While the focus here is the Narooma Youth Café, similar cafés operate in other centres such as Bateman's Bay and Moruya, and utilise the transport project.

The Transport Project

The project ensures that young people attending the Narooma Youth Café are able to get access – for a gold coin donation – to safe and efficient transport home at the end of the evening. This transport covers the area from Bodalla down to Bermagui (approximately 51 kilometres), with Narooma about mid-way between the two centres. Café staff coordinate the transport home,

planning routes to maximise the efficient use of the taxis.

The Eurobodalla Youth Transport Project evolved from a Transport Forum that was held in 2004. Youth Committee members attended the forum and presented a submission to the resulting Transport Working Group on youth transport issues. The Shire's Social Plan had identified youth transport as a need, which also became a priority for the Eurobodalla Transport Working Group.

The top five priorities identified by the Eurobodalla Passenger Transport Working Group in 2005-06 were to:

1. improve relationships between all transport operators;
2. provide safe transport options for young people;
3. reduce isolation and increase access to services and employment for ATSI communities;
4. develop interchangeable subsidies between taxis and buses with the use of vouchers; and
5. reduce fare inequities between rural and metropolitan areas.

Members of the Transport Working Group and Eurobodalla Shire Council staff worked with the three taxi services to develop fare zones and a voucher system

supported by local operators and the NSW Ministry of Transport Regional Transport Coordinator. The key stakeholders in the transport voucher scheme are:

- » local young people who use the transport services;
- » the Youth Café staff who coordinate and confirm requirements for transport;
- » the transport providers who provide the services as required and invoice Council for payment;
- » the Council's Youth Officer who oversees the project, administers reimbursement of fares, and collates transport data; and
- » Government agency representatives: the Eurobodalla Shire Council, the Department of Community Services and the Ministry of Transport.

Funding

Initial funding for the project was used in its development: gauging the need for long term transport solutions that would reduce transport disadvantage. The Project's on-going success has attracted new funding from the NSW Government's Aboriginal Child Youth and Family Strategy (ACYFS) and from Eurobodalla Shire Council. It has paved the way for the development of a sustainable community-wide voucher project. In addition, gold coin donations from young people as they use the transport, contribute to the scheme.

Operational details

The operation of the transport program is based on cooperation between transport providers, Café and Council staff and young people. It relies on young people behaving appropriately and not abusing the service. When they attend the café, they are required to sign in and indicate to the staff at that time if they will need transport home. They contribute a gold coin towards the cost of this transport and are issued with a voucher to give the driver. This both encourages participation in the Café's planned activities and also prevents young people walking in at the end of the activities for a cheap ride home.

At the end of the night, transport is provided in taxis, maxi taxis, wheelchair accessible taxis or buses as required. All drivers are accredited transport drivers and comply with the relevant codes for service. Café staff coordinate the transport home, planning routes to maximise the efficient use of the taxis. Kim comments:

"It's a simple process to book transport each day because the young people sign in and record their destination when they arrive. Most young people from the south are from Bermagui or Wallaga lake and that means the Koorie young people can get here. "

At the end of each month, the transport providers send itemised invoices to Council for re-imburement, and each Café banks the gold coin donations. The voucher system is a secure way of providing transport because the young people don't have to carry a lot of cash, and it also provides data for Council's transport research. The Council's Youth Officer collates the data to monitor usage and issues reimbursement to the transport providers.

"We have found that this is a cost effective system when travel distances are considered (it costs about \$7.50 per person per trip).

We have established clear rules and expectations for use of the transport that the young people respect. The taxi drivers work in well with us and know virtually all the young people. They demand good behaviour from them and we talk a lot about good behaviour from the beginning. Young people can be banned from traveling if necessary, but we would never see someone stranded and would make sure they can get home. However they know they mustn't abuse the system. "

Benefits of the transport project

The main benefit of the transport project is that it has enabled young people – particularly young Aboriginal people from Wallaga Lake, Bermagui, Tomakin, Bodalla, Batehaven, Mogo and Malua Bay – to attend social and recreational activities. When we interviewed a group of young people aged 12 to 15 years about the Café, they commented on the importance of being able to get there to join in and meet friends.

"We have found that approximately 100 extra young Aboriginal people are participating in Café activities each month. This means that a range of youth workers can visit the Youth Cafés to consult with young people on issues of importance to Indigenous and local communities. "

Better access to the Youth Cafés through cheaper transport for young people also promotes other events and builds trust in the organised activities. There is evidence of improved relationships between staff and all young people attending the Youth Cafes.

Secondly, the project enables young people to travel safely and parents support this. A mother of a disabled young person indicated her appreciation of being able to transport her other teenager home safely. In addition, Youth Workers are no longer put in situations where they have to drive young people home.

There have been other indirect benefits: a decrease in overall youth crime in the past two years across the Shire and an impact on youth health issues with increase of engagement with services such as community health, alcohol and other drugs, and sexual health.

The project has also had an economic impact, with improved viability of taxi and bus services through the extra patronage. The project has influenced the establishment of the Eurobodalla Travel Voucher for general community use, and this is funded through the Ministry for Transport and the Premier's Office. In this program, vouchers are sold for cash and can be provided, for example, to elderly parents or children. Credit card sized vouchers are bar coded to enable monitoring and research data collection. A Youth Transport Information Card was circulated to 4000 young people to provide a higher level of awareness of local and regional transport options. There has been interest from other local government areas about this project as a model for local transport.

The Narooma Youth Café

The term 'Café' is applied broadly here, implying not just food services, but the provision of a place for young people aged 12 to 17 years to meet and socialise under the supervision of youth workers and volunteers. There are two Shire Youth Cafés at the Bateman's Bay Community Centre and at the Narooma Library Community Centre. These Cafés have been operating since 2005 with funding for their establishment from the Eurobodalla Shire Council and from the Department of Transport and Regional Services (DoTARS). Each Café is advised by a Café Committee of a small group of local young people in the

age range of 12 to 17 years. These young people influence Café activities, thereby playing a positive role in their community and gaining greater independence through being responsible for projects with the assistance of adults.

When the Cafés first started, they were based on discussions with young people about their needs. The young people designed the rules and the guidelines, and chose equipment. Young people now attend the Youth Cafés between 3.30pm and 7.00pm on Wednesdays and Thursdays, and 3.30pm and 9.00pm on Fridays.

Adults, apart from staff and volunteers, are not allowed. These staff and volunteers undertake relevant legal checks, training and an induction process.

The Cafés are advertised in the local papers and through schools, as well as by word of mouth by the young people. The main needs of young people are for interaction with each other in a space that's theirs and where they feel safe. They're there basically to be with their friends. In conversations with a group of young people of 12 to 15 years, the main reasons given for attending the Café were to meet friends, to hang out in a safe place and to have fun. Kim notes:

"Young people mix fairly well. They can do what they want to do, within reason and within the rules. Our activities include pool, indoor and outdoor games, craft and art. Drinks and refreshments are provided free of charge. We have an in-house barista course and teach them how to make coffee. We're attached to the local library where they can do their homework and use the computers. They sit around and talk to each other. It's like a social club, fairly loosely structured; but we do have rules.

We start with the expectation that they respect each other. We then have a set of guidelines that we go through when they first join: no swearing, no fighting, respect each other, clean up and respect the space. A spin-off from this is that Koorie and non-Koorie young people relate well together here when they sometimes don't in other places such as schools. The young people often look to each other to enforce the rules – that's healthy. They know they can be suspended if necessary."

Young people interviewed about the procedures comment on how fair the rules are and how it is easy to be here:

"Staff are good and fair, cheerful and happy; they put me in a good mood and look after me. (Male, 13 years)"

"I can respect staff and ask for help. They are good, not angry (Female, 15 years)"

Staff make fair rules; they are not bossy, but very calm. (Male, 12 years).

Being able to get to the Youth Cafés and home easily with subsidised transport means that parents can relax about where their children are and parents benefit too. Young people reported:

"Mum's happy that I come here. And I see my brother."

"Parents trust me to come here."

"Gives Mum some free time."

"Mum knows where I am."

The young people interviewed also readily identify personal benefits from being able to access the Cafés:

"I learn how to mix with others and play games. I don't go hanging out on the streets on Friday night."

"Having fun."

"I get time out from home and stress relief."

"Social and recreation; hang out with friends; use up energy on footy, pool. Learn pool and footy skills."

"Sport, fun, competitions; able to talk to people, learn good manners."

"I'm not so bored now I've made new friends and learnt new games."

"I'm not as shy or scared to talk to people"

What works

The Café works because we engage with the young people, give them some responsibility, let them play

their music, and join in on activities with them. An activity such as drawing around the table can be a way of providing space for conversations about all kinds of things.

Secondly, we don't judge them: they have the right to express their opinions. If we don't think something is appropriate, we talk it over with them. The guidelines are consistently enforced to create a place of safety for all who attend.

The young people emphasised three things that made the Café work: *"The workers are fair with the rules"*, *"We learn to do new things"* and *"Activities are things we like."*

"There are still difficulties for us," said Kim.

The hard things for us to cope with are the differences between young people who have a lot and those who don't; some come from dysfunctional families. If someone's in crisis, we are able to refer them to the Department of Community Services (DOCs) with the young person's knowledge. But we acknowledge that we can't fix all their problems. We aim to provide a safe place for when they are here.

The transport system works because it is both affordable and flexible, and a joint project between Council, the transport providers and the Cafés. We monitor it closely and have clear rules that are often enforced by the young people themselves because they don't want to lose the service.

We know it works because there has been continued growth in the system's use. Since September 2005, we have issued over 2500 vouchers and transported over 7200 young people. In particular, there has been an increase in the level of participation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) young people. Young people using the service have provided positive feedback to Council throughout the life of the project. They tell us that it works because the improved travel for them has resulted in increased safety, participation, access to health and community services and youth focused information, social and employment opportunities.

In summary, both projects work because they work together – they're interlinked through Eurobodalla Shire Council. They are about safe travel, access for young people from local and isolated areas, open to all young people from 12 to 17 years and providing young people with somewhere to join that's basically theirs. The

transport makes it possible for all local young people to join in.

It works for us because the young people were involved from the start, the approaches were based on feedback from local young people and communities about their needs, we have support from the Council and Government agencies, we have clear rules, it is cost effective, we involve the young people in decision making, there is no discrimination, and we maintain good communication with the people who operate the system – the drivers – through the Transport Working Group.

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In Summary:

The Eurobodalla Youth Transport and Youth Café project in Narooma, NSW provides transport and space for isolated young people. It aims to:

- » provide safe transport options for young people;
- » reduce isolation and increase access to services and employment for ATSI communities; and
- » provide a social club (the café) for local young people aged 12 – 17 years and coordinate the transport project to ensure efficient and proper use of the service.

Outcomes for young people have been:

- » better access to structured activities;
 - » increased involvement of ATSI young people;
 - » that young people travel safely and parents support this;
 - » provision of somewhere to hang out with friends; and
 - » an indirect influence on local youth crime levels and risky behaviour.
- » Key learnings from the project have been that:
- » cheap access to transport increases participation, builds trust in organised activities and reduces risks for families and risks of petty crime;
 - » a transport voucher system is viable for wider groups in the community; and
 - » young people value structured activities when they have a say.

The project says it works because it:

- » involves young people from the start;
- » bases projects on feedback from local young people and communities about their needs;
- » provides support from transport people, the Council and Government agencies;
- » has clear rules;
- » makes sure there is no discrimination; and
- » maintains good contacts with drivers through a transport working group.

What Does Work?

By focusing on ways that groups, programs and projects address inclusion for all young people, we move away from a focus on what young people 'lack' or 'are' or 'do'. We can talk about organisational responses to needs.

Those ideas of inclusion are acted out on a broad stage. Most of the programs featured in this publication don't restrict participation to a particular target group but attempt to include all young people. There are, however, exceptions where programs address the needs of specific groups (eg same sex attracted young people) or provide specifically targeted services (such as clinical support). They do this in response to their specific focus on meeting needs. At the same time, the nature of all of these programs is that they attract young people who are or feel particularly in need of support, who are 'on the edge' of broader communities such as schools, or where, due to social or economic circumstances, the program orientation deliberately tackles local issues to the advantage of the young people involved.

All the programs and approaches represented here are concerned with young people's engagement, self-esteem, access to support and ways of enhancing participation in the wider community. In doing so, they have identified key factors that work for them, and provide important guidance for us all:

The importance of **context**:

- » safe physical and psychological environments;
- » affordable access to support and programs;
- » good community networks;

The importance of **people**:

- » skilled workers, leadership and effective role models;
- » strong friendships;
- » support at all levels of management;

The importance of **ethos**:

- » focus on strengths and empowerment;
- » building self-esteem and confidence and expanding horizons;
- » respectful relationships between young people and adults;

The importance of **enjoyment and purpose**:

- » providing challenges and opportunity for self-expression and creativity;
- » providing activities that are fun;
- » meaningful activities, beyond simple entertainment.

However, these programs demonstrate that there is no single or simple approach that works – every time, for every young person. The complexity of life for young people and their families, the range of expectations brought to any situation, the prior experiences of success or failure, and the broader social context all demand a multi-faceted approach. That approach will draw on a range of expertise, combined methodologies, personal resources of individuals, and cooperation between agencies to suit the circumstances of all involved and to realise the objectives or purposes of the program.

So let's point to what these stories tell us about what works ... and about avoiding simplistic or one-dimensional solutions:

It's not just access...

A transport scheme for relatively isolated young people in the *Eurobodalla Shire* grew out of a local consultation. It works there because it gives young people access to the town. However, the scheme is more effective because, when they get there, they have access to a venue that they value for its socialising and supportive atmosphere and because they can use the system at a reasonable cost (because it is subsidised through funding achieved by inter-agency cooperation). The manner in which the two aspects – transport and youth café – function, is linked directly to the skills of the workers who coordinate them. This enables young people to feel safe and encourages families and the broader community to continue to support the program.

It's not just bringing people of different backgrounds together...

Adapting the lessons of some overseas programs to local circumstances worked to benefit young women in Hume because the project began with detailed local

consultation and networking. It then identified a core group of young women and brought them together, through carefully structured experiences that encouraged healthy interaction, in a safe, supportive atmosphere. Being gender specific also worked – it limited the issues and encouraged easier interactions. Building in fun activities avoided drop-out. But the activities also led to highly productive outcomes because the young people were empowered with skills and new bonds to develop their own public event and to celebrate with families and community members. *CMY's Building Bridges* project worked because it was well planned and tackled several factors in a multi-dimensional way.

It's not just a chance to do some drama or art activities...

Four of the programs featured here focus on creative activities through the arts. They tell us that art and drama can expand horizons for young people. While the motivations of these programs are very similar, each caters for a different target group and focuses on outcomes that are appropriate to the needs of that group.

At *YGLAM*, the emphasis is on empowering young people to own the process within an agreed set of expectations. The program also aims to build commitment to a public performance that makes good links with the community and allows for expression of young people's concerns in public. It provides a combination of support, role modelling, shared decision-making and skill acquisition in an environment that expects young people to work at achieving a group outcome through theatre.

Many of the same principles operate through the *Tuggeranong Messengers* program. This combines centre-based art and drama workshops for selected students to enhance self-expression and build confidence, alongside an outreach program that develops performances on issues for schools. It works because of the mix of diverse skills available from artists, drama tutors, education and youth workers and clinical psychologists, all of whom contribute expertise. Activities and productions occur within solid guidelines that foster in young people a sense of their capacity to contribute to decisions and the creative process. The public performance is vital. Such arts activities develop self-esteem, confidence and greater connection with community

DADAA focuses on social inclusion strategies that enable young people with disabilities to connect with their community. The program provides a combination of skilled arts workers and partnering with local youth centres. Together, they provide arts workshops that combine fun activities with hands-on skill development, but this is also done in a non-judgemental environment that provides new peer networks. The activities are built on the interests of participants, are usually challenging or utilise stimulating novel approaches. The outcomes are featured in local festivals and encourage participation in the wider community. Here, art is a catalyst for social inclusion. The program is working towards sustainable strategies.

The *Radio Reconnect* project is not just about getting young people and adults together to discuss issues. A radio play provides a creative focus with a very real public outcome, and asked young people and adults to work together with a common goal. In doing so, relationships were explored and many participants gained new understandings of themselves in relationship to others, and of the resources of their community. The activities were conducted by skilled facilitators; they were able to draw together a disparate group of adults and young people to realise their aims; they were also able to reconnect some participants with their community through group interaction and the radio station.

It's not just providing withdrawal programs...

The Port Pirie *Flexible Learning Initiative* is a 'whole of community' approach to learning that improves well-being and young people's chances of completing schooling. It combines flexible learning centres in the school and outside the school with counselling and case management as required. It also offers a combination of academic and skills-based learning, and encourages students to plan their own program. While the school remains the key place for students, they also enter the community, and this wider community contributes to their learning.

It's not just an adventure camp...

Young people who enter the *YET* program have expressed a desire to tackle personal issues in a supportive

environment; but they are often surprised by the challenges they meet in the program. It confronts them with a physically and mentally demanding combination of physical exertion, drawing on personal resources and working together to achieve community goals. It does this through a process of relative isolation and builds in learning about survival, the traditional Aboriginal culture of the area and young people's own personal resources. Young people are encouraged to develop future plans and are supported over the following year with personal contact and group reunions.

It's not just casual visits to an in-patient ward...

Orygen Youth Health achieves more than clinical treatment and case management through its *Peer Support* program. Young people initiated this program; management has then valued and trusted them to deliver enhanced social relationships and good role models for in-patients and visitors. It works because of the strong framework and training on which it is built, the support provided in the ward from staff, the institution of regular evaluation and supervision, and the high level of commitment from the young people who act as Peer Support Officers. The Peer Support workers who come through the clinical program are familiar with the system and are of similar age to the young people in the service. They play an important part in *Orygen Youth Health's* public education initiatives. The program has a positive impact on the social environment of the ward and enhances the self-worth of the peer support workers.

It's not just friendship from mentoring...

In both the *Cairns Youth Mentor Scheme* and the *Flinders Inspire Mentor Program*, the building of positive and friendly relationships is at the core of the approach. However, each goes further than that. Each mentoring approach elicits many benefits for participants beyond friendship. While the Cairns program involves adults from the community linking with local young people, the Flinders program links University students as role models with young people from local schools. Both programs work well because of the interaction of several factors:

- » they are carefully planned, with clear goals and guidelines;

- » mentors are carefully selected and receive on-going support and advice;
- » strong relationships develop between community agencies;
- » action research informs practice; and
- » they bring participants together for regular review and support.

Both of these programs comment on the value that the volunteer mentors bring to the situation by being good role models who are persistent and demonstrate reliability to young people. This is particularly important for situations where young people may have been severely disappointed in previous personal relationships of trust.

So...

Beyond all those strategies and approaches, we recognise more fundamental factors. Ultimately, the programs documented here work because of the personal dedication and skills of the people responsible for them and because they place high value on evaluating progress and achievements against goals and program guidelines. They work despite constraints like the wide diversity of needs presented, community assumptions about young people (and about 'these young people' in particular), funding uncertainties and time constraints.

All demonstrate commitment, not only to the young people involved, but also to the core values and principles involved in working successfully with young people. Here they re-emphasise the importance of:

- » focusing on the strengths of young people rather than on deficits;
- » working on these strengths to empower young people;
- » building capacity to meet challenges rather than simply doing things for young people;
- » providing options for young people to tackle their life experiences in ways that are responsive to them, their interests and needs; and
- » doing all of this within a safe environment.

Finally, all these programs draw on their range of skills and resources to link all young people to and with their communities in on-going and sustainable ways.

Mike Kimberley

Summary Of Learnings From What Works In Inclusive Approaches With Young People

PROGRAM	Active participation of young people	Positive and diverse approaches	Clear guidelines	Clear & practical outcomes: skills etc	Links with parents and community	Support positive role models	Build in reflection	Long-term commitment	Knowing the young people	Other
Building Bridges – ‘Hanging Out in the North’: Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY), Melbourne, Vic: inclusive activities with young women	Support young people to establish group norms from the outset and throughout the project – this facilitates peer-driven strategies to respect cultural and faith diversity	Encourage participation in a myriad of ways (visual, auditory and kinaesthetic engagement) to enable young people to demonstrate their strengths and develop new skills in areas where they may lack confidence		Include ongoing project activities that are fun and aimed at building skills and confidence - these are important for keeping young people engaged and also support the development of meaningful and ongoing relationships beyond the project	Establish good communication with parents, guardians and community groups in early stages and follow up with a celebration of achievements with them. Build partnerships with local service providers	Employ peer co-facilitators to deliver training and facilitate activities – this will offer positive role modelling and understanding of shared life experiences	Dedicate adequate time to debriefing - this is imperative to ensure learnings are properly absorbed and understood by young people	Support the development of meaningful and ongoing relationships beyond the project. Connect young people to local initiatives beyond the life of the project		
Port Pirie Flipside - Flexible Learning Initiative: Innovative Community Action Network, SA: a withdrawal support program	Ensure students decide what they need to do	Provide flexible learning options for all students	Provide structured programs, with clear rules and expectations	Provide hands on, practical activities and assistance with formal studies	Involve community services for support Enable the school to act as the hub for whole of community responsibility	Provide one-to-one support by mentors, teachers, and counsellors in small groups			Have teachers who know the kids well	

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Youth Enterprise Trust, Qld: transition to adulthood through wilderness experiences	Provide opportunities to feel valued and respected	Enable young people to use their personal resources and to work together	Provide a very structured program led by experienced and qualified people	<p>Offer challenging activities that give a sense of accomplishment</p> <p>Conduct activities in the bush, which works its own magic</p> <p>Provide activities that are physically and mentally challenging</p>				Maintain contact and follow-up for 12 months	Try to judge when and if participants are ready for the program	
Encouraging and Supporting Young People: The Cairns Youth Mentoring Scheme, Qld: mentoring socially isolated young people			Have clear goals and operating procedures		<p>Develop good community support</p> <p>Don't re-invent the wheel – consult the National Youth Mentoring network</p>	<p>Provide training for mentors and mid-partnership review</p> <p>Base mentoring on the friendship model</p>	Build in action research based evaluation			

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Inspire Peer Mentoring Program: Flinders University, SA: mentoring disengaged students	Support students to work with students, emphasising the mentoring aspect to help young people			Make it school-learning based – gives the two people something to work on together	Build a strong relationship with the school Invite participating schools together on campus for a partners conference	Involve Uni students who are committed to their own learning and to being role models	Build in an action research approach, giving the mentors a voice			Use a community development approach, by setting up space for it to happen
Peer Support Program at Orygen Youth Health, Vic: peer support in a clinical setting	Involve peer Support workers who come through the clinical program, are familiar with the system and are of similar age to the young people in the service. Involve people who are passionate about the place and whose experience through the program was positive, so they want to give value back.	Operate in an open minded, listening manner, and emphasise the positives	Have frameworks, guidelines and training for peer support workers to ensure individuals know what parameters they are working within		Have full support and trust from management		Build in regular action research and evaluation, including monthly supervision sessions for peers support workers			

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The YGLAM Performing Arts Project: Moreland Community Health Service, Vic: empowering same sex attracted young people	<p>Ensure that young people own the project</p> <p>Respect the ideas and aspirations of young people involved</p>			Have a practical arts-based activity as the focus	Establish community contact and the chance to express views publicly					<p>Provide support with emerging issues and make referral services available</p> <p>Pay attention to the power balance in decision making</p>
SEE and Say: Disability in the Arts, Disadvantage in the Arts (DADAA), Fremantle, WA: engaging disabled and disadvantaged young people through the arts	Involve young people in the planning	Base it in art activities that encourage self-expression and bring people together		Work at building self-esteem and confidence	<p>Establish strong working partnerships between key organisations</p> <p>Involve the community</p>	Employ art facilitators with appropriate qualifications and experience				

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The Messengers Program: Tuggeranong Arts Centre, ACT: an arts-based program for promoting resilience	<p>Esnure that young people have a strong sense of their capacity to make decisions</p> <p>Empower young people through good group development practices</p>	<p>Provide support from a team with diverse skills and a mix of skills such as youth work and Art/Drama to broaden the scope</p> <p>Take flexible approaches to the work</p>	<p>Develop guidelines for good practice</p> <p>Enable strong meaningful discussions, in a safe environment, guided by the expertise of group leaders who can bring in specialists to tackle particular issues or work with an individual</p>	<p>Base it in arts activities that develop self-esteem, confidence and greater connection with community</p>	<p>Involve youth workers in activities to soften the boundaries</p>					<p>Provide support with emerging issues and make referral services available</p> <p>Pay attention to the power balance in decision making</p>
Radio Reconnect: Huon Valley, Tas: community development through radio	<p>Involve young people in the planning and structuring of activities</p> <p>Make it something they really want to do</p>	<p>Don't impose too rigid a structure; allow activities to take unintended directions</p>		<p>Focus on the interests of young people and their needs.</p>	<p>Involve older community members where possible to expand experience</p>					<p>Provide support structures: access, transport, food, counselling as appropriate</p>
Eurobodalla Youth Transport and Youth Café: Narooma, NSW: transport and space for isolated young people	<p>Involve the young people in decision making from the start</p>	<p>Make sure there is no discrimination</p>		<p>Base projects on feedback from local young people and communities about their needs</p>	<p>Have clear rules</p> <p>Provide support from transport people, the Council and Government agencies;</p> <p>Maintain good contacts with drivers through a transport working group</p>					