



FOUNDATION FOR
Young Australians

young**socialpioneers**

2009-2010 EVALUATION REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Description of YSP

The Young Social Pioneers (YSP) program was established by The Foundation for Young Australians in 2009 as the Australian arm of the International Youth Foundation's global initiative Youth Action Net. The program seeks to develop the capacities and enhance the professional and social support networks for 14 young change makers, aged between 18 and 29 years. These change makers effect positive change in their local, national and global communities through a range of innovative social action initiatives. The YSP program achieves this by delivering a 12 month learning journey, which encourages participants to inquire into who they are and what they do as 'young social pioneers', while building skills around leadership and sustainable business practices. The program also seeks to connect individuals to networks and communities that closely align with the pioneers' work and personal philosophies.

Evaluation Objectives

The evaluation of the 2009 Young Social Pioneers program forms part of a three year evaluation designed to capture multi-level outcomes: individual, organisational and community. This current evaluation, which focused on individual outcomes, aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the nature and influence of the program on its participants and identify any underlying enablers or barriers to the pioneers fulfilling the goals of their initiatives. The evaluation was organised around the following evaluation questions:

- Did YSP deliver a 12 month learning journey which expanded and deepened participants' inquiry into who they are and what they do as social change makers? Did it further equip them with comprehensive skills and a range of attributes which enabled them to become even more effective leaders in their work and in their lives?
- To what extent did YSP offer participants opportunities to deliver their message in a range of contexts and events?
- Did YSP facilitate the connection of participants to a community of individuals within Australia and the world?
- Did YSP introduce participants to sustainable and alternative business practices which aligned with their work and personal philosophies?

Methodology

The evaluation employed a qualitative methodology made up of interviews and the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique. Interviews were conducted with the pioneers at key milestones during the 12 month program cycle. The MSC session, and related panel discussion involving three stakeholders, took place at the program's completion.

Key Findings

The following provides a brief summary of the key findings of the 2009 YSP evaluation:

- Participants reported an **increased level of self-understanding** as a result of participating in the YSP program. This had the effect of affirming their sense of their role as leaders of social change. Moreover, achieving a greater sense of

clarity around the purpose and goals of their initiative was a key outcome for many of the participants

- The social networks of the participants were significantly broadened as a result of the YSP experience, which led to an **increase in pathways** for expanding their initiatives beyond their original expectations
- Similarly, the program facilitated the **creation of a community of social entrepreneurs**, with participants experiencing a sense of being part of something bigger than themselves
- **Sustainability** was an ongoing and frustrating challenge for the participants who were keen to develop sustainable business practices. The evaluation revealed a tension in the program between prioritising personal development and providing development for initiatives
- Notwithstanding the challenges around sustainability, participants **valued skills in succession planning**. That is, nearly all pioneers expressed a desire to be working on a different social action initiative in the future. There was a desire to learn more about how to transition out of an initiative in a way that would not impede its continuation
- Mentors turned out to be an important dimension of the program, as they provided both **personal and professional development structures** for participants in a way that complemented other program activities.

Conclusions

The 2009 Young Social Pioneers evaluation has revealed that the program provided an enhanced sense of community for the participants and a revitalised understanding of their own achievements and future possibilities. It also led to a greater appreciation for leadership, and what could be achieved through collaboration and leveraging networks both for pioneers' immediate projects and for future endeavours. This sense of being part of

something bigger than oneself resonates with the overarching aims of YSP. Having a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the qualities of good leadership, participants expanded their personal boundaries and self-perceptions as change makers.

Both data sets revealed that much depends on an environment which actively facilitates dialogue and the importance of working together and being connected with others through the shared experience of the program. As a result of this, participants were able to identify pathways for the expansion of their social networks; not surprisingly, with this came an increased sense of possibility for their initiatives. However, the challenge of how to make one's initiative sustainable emerged as an ongoing concern for the pioneers. Providing more expertise in social enterprise frameworks could be an option for the program, with almost half commenting that to make their initiative sustainable they would create a social enterprise.

The issue of mentors was highlighted as a key dimension of the program. For a national program that has participants spread across the country, mentors serve as a powerful conduit for keeping participants connected to the program. Participants who experienced a greater sense of accountability through their mentor felt that their project thrived and as a result describe a positive YSP experience. However, there were clear limitations in the effectiveness of the mentor role as demonstrated by variable mentor experiences.

Recommendations

- Greater effort should be made to enhance the transferability of skills learned throughout the program
- Develop business practices more tailored to the particularities of the work of the pioneers and provide training for this, i.e. social enterprise models

- Increase opportunities for pioneers to connect to fundraising opportunities and funding channels
- Ensure a greater mentor presence in the program with more structured and explicitly defined mentoring roles, including clarity around expectations and contact time requirements

Case Studies

Shona Cools: Linkz Incorporated



Shona Cools established Linkz Incorporated, a non-profit organisation seeking to foster connections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

“During school holidays, many communities effectively empty out,” Shona says. “Teachers, doctors, nurses, police and council staff all head home and leave the community pretty much on their own for six to eight weeks ... it just didn’t make a whole lot of sense”.

In one remote community, home to large numbers of gang fighters, Linkz has identified a selection of boys who have shown leadership potential, and partnered each with a mentor – players from the Essendon Football Club. This model will be used for future Linkz partnerships.

www.linkz.net.au

Alissa Phillips: S.P.A.C.E.



Alissa Phillips established S.P.A.C.E (Specialised Programs and Community Endeavours) in an outer suburb of Brisbane as a community centre with a particular interest in special needs. Since 2007 its fitness and learning programs have provided a rehabilitative service for people living with a disability while fostering relationships between those people and the broader community.

In 2007 Alissa received the Lord Mayor’s Youth Citizen of the Year Award and a Lord Mayor’s Community Trust Appeal bursary of \$100,000.

What local government had not managed to achieve in seven years, Alissa and her team did in eighteen months. “I’ve never waited for government permission to do anything,” Alissa says, “If I had, I’d be two years behind what I am now. But I’ve always put the people work before the paperwork”.

<http://thespace.org.au>

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