Partnerships
in the
Youth Sector

Compiled and edited by **Fiona Taylor**

AUSTRALIAN YOUTH RESEARCH CENTRE

What Works Australia

Stories from
around Australia

fya | FOUNDATION FOR
Young Australians

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Acknowledgements

The researchers extend their warmest thanks to everyone who contributed their time, efforts and thoughts to this publication. In particular we wish to thank all the interviewees from the twelve projects studied here, for participating, sharing your thoughts and offering this window into your work.

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

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

ABI	Acquired Brain Injury
ACE	Adult and Community Education
AERF	Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation
AOD	Alcohol and Other Drugs
AP	Assistant or Associate Principal
APY	Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara
AQIS	Australian Quarantine Inspection Services
AVGAS	Aviation Gas
AVO	Apprehended Violence Order
BRIT	Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE (Vic)
CAYLUS	Central Australian Youth Link Up Service (NT)
CBD	Central Business District
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CEP	Country Education Project
CLD or CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CMY	Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (Vic)
COMGAS	A re-brand of AVGAS – Aviation Gas
D&A	Drug and Alcohol
DECS	Department of Education and Children's Services (SA)
DIA	Department of Indigenous Affairs (WA)
DOCS	Department of Children's Services (NSW)
EET	Education, Employment and Training
ESL	English as a Second Language
ETRF	Education and Training Reforms for the Future (Qld)
FACSIA	Families and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Federal Government Department)
FLO	Flexible Learning Outcomes (SA)
GAP	Great Alternative Program (Hervey Bay, Qld)
ICAN	Innovative Community Action Networks (SA)
JJ	Juvenile Justice
JPET	Job Placement, Employment and Training
KALACC	Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre
LGA	Local Government Area
LLEN	Local Learning and Employment Network (Vic)
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NPY	Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (Women's Council, Aboriginal Corporation)
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
PCYC	Police Community Youth Centres (WA)
PTA	Public Transport Authority
RAFT	Resourcing Adolescents and Families Team (NSW)
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
RYSS	Regional Youth Support Services (Gosford, NSW)
SAPOL	South Australia Police
SACE	South Australian Certificate of Education
SRC	Student Representative Council
SSO	School Support Officer
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
UNYA	United Nations Youth Association
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
YAC	Youth Advisory Council or Committee
YAPA	Youth Action and Policy Association (NSW)
YAW	Youth Arts Warehouse (Gosford, NSW)
YSC	Youth Support Coordinator (Qld)
YTSI	Youth Transition Support Initiative (Vic)
YVC	Youth Voice Committee (Hobson's Bay, Vic)

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.

Dr. Lucas Walsh
Director of Research
The Foundation for Young Australians

lucas.walsh@fya.org.au

Working in Partnerships

Partnerships, collaborations, cooperation between sectors ... these are words and phrases that have been used within the youth sector for decades. The ideas have been endorsed in the policies of governments at all levels; they have been asserted and advocated by the community sector.

They are words and phrases that have been used in hope, in anger and as a challenge, in a belief in their magic. Sometimes we use the terms usefully, sometimes loosely, sometimes with a naïve belief that it will be easy to move outside 'silos' and seek 'joined up solutions'.

Yet we know that the reality of practice is much harder than that. Attempts at collaboration stutter and fail; potential partnerships don't get off the ground; we settle sometimes for uneasy cooperation and acknowledgement. Sometimes it's easier to work in our separate organisations, and sometimes this separate work continues despite the obvious needs of young people that remain un-met and the opportunities for joint responses that are unrealised.

But sometimes those partnerships and collaborations soar – and take us somewhere else. Sometimes there's excitement and trust and great outcomes for young people – much more than we could have achieved separately. Partnerships and collaboration can provide youth workers with both opportunity and challenge.

Recent *Codes of Ethical Practice for Youth Workers* [1] *f*requently include responsibilities for 'Cooperation and Collaboration' and these clearly locate the primary rationale for such approaches as ensuring the **best outcomes for young people**:

> *Youth workers seek to cooperate and collaborate with others in order to secure the best possible outcomes for young people... Collaboration between workers is an essential component of ethical practice as it seeks to ensure the best possible outcomes for young people.*

If we are to ensure that such statements are translated into reality, there is need for clarity at the outset. Making distinctions between the meanings intended for 'partnership', 'collaboration', 'consortium' and 'cooperation' is sometimes not simple. A beginning point might be some definitions:

» **Cooperation** simply occurs when people or organisations work together with mutually agreed upon goals.
» **Collaboration** signifies a more formal, structured arrangement in which people or organisations work together towards those goals.
» A **consortium** is the association of two or more people or organisations aiming to participate in a shared activity, towards a common goal.
» A **partnership** can have legal and business connotations, including shared ownership and shared legal liability. However, the word 'partnership' has frequently been used interchangeably with that of 'collaboration', or even more generically to encompass this whole area, and this will be the case in this publication.

Cooperation will thus be used to describe the behaviour of organisations working together fairly loosely – without changing their own agendas and intentions. The terms **collaboration**, **consortium** and **partnership** will then be used interchangeably (with a preference for the word **partnership**), signifying a more *intentional arrangement* to reach agreement on goals and action.

> *Whereas in cooperation there is a rather loose and less-binding relationship, collaboration refers to a durable and pervasive relationship in which previously separated organisations are brought together with full commitment to a common mission. [2]*

The study of partnerships, collaboration and cooperation has, in itself, developed fields of inquiry across many sectors, including management, business, health and education – and many of these sectors are represented in the examples in this publication.

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1   Eg: the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Inc., 2007: 17

2   Knight, Knight and Teghe, 2007: 51

The Need for this Publication

Respondents to a survey of the youth sector carried out early in 2007 clearly indicated that they sought advice about and examples of success in youth work that was occurring in non-traditional environments, and within collaborative arrangements. Specifically, many respondents expressed interest in stories about youth work linked to education, training and employment – and carried out in partnership with organisations and structures in these areas.

When asked within this broad interest area about: "Which topics or themes of good practice would be useful to you?", respondents provided some typical responses:

» "Sector development ideas. Models of youth service delivery, including consortium building and amalgamation."
» "Collaboration, especially in rural areas where resources and access have limitations, using community resources in the absence of outside resources being available."
» "Programs achieving consistency in working with young people, although staff are in a multi-disciplinary team with different skills and education; maintaining boundaries."
» "Advocacy in a school – blurring of roles; not getting confused with 'discipline' issues."
» "Industry mentoring youth. School and industry engagement."
» "Getting all services and projects to agree to work 'from the same page' rather than be competitive and have varying philosophical frameworks."

So this first publication – *What Works in Partnerships in the Youth Sector* – aims to:

» explore some successful models of services providing for young people with a variety of strengths and needs, across a range of providers, with a particular focus on partnerships between sectors;
» explore some complex relationships and organisational funding scenarios between groups with differing values and cultures; and
» respond, in particular, to increasing demands for youth workers to work within other structures such as schools and TAFE, and alongside other organisations: legal, training and employment and so on.

Unpacking 'What Works in Partnerships in the Youth Sector?'

To address the question of 'What Works in Partnerships in the Youth Sector?' in this publication, we are required to ask several big questions:

» Who is it working *for*?
» Who are the partnerships *between*? and
» What criteria do we *use* for 'what works'?

Who is it working *for*?

Let us say at the outset that we have strongly adopted the core statement of youth work codes of ethics: that the criterion of 'Positive Outcomes for Young People' had to be strongly met for inclusion in this publication. While we will note later that, in sustainable partnerships, all partners experience positive outcomes, that is not the primary intention of 'what works'.

There are common misconceptions that linked up services must *inevitably* result in better outcomes for young people. For example, Stokes and Tyler argue that:

" *issues of access and efficiency of 'coverage', are not necessarily a simple argument for placement or co-location of services within schools... the more complex issues of power and control, and of perception of services (including education) by young people must be considered.* [3] "

Whilst these writers are speaking specifically of schools as 'service hubs' or 'one-stop-shops', the argument could equally be made for other forms of co-location, or even about increased connection between services. For example, some young people tell us that they prefer to keep different parts of their lives separate, so that they can experience success in one area, whilst accessing support in another area – without 'leakage' or disclosure between the two. Some forms of partnership will increase the connectedness of service providers, and may deliver outcomes for organisations (including increased efficiencies) while will not necessarily improving outcomes for young people. We need to be careful here.

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3   Stokes and Tyler, 1997: p 17

Story:	Sectors participating in the partnership:
The Opal Alliance	Youth, Indigenous Women's Council, Corporate
RYSS Youth Arts Warehouse	Youth, Business, Rotary
Parramatta Children's Court Assistance Scheme	Youth, Legal Aid, Court
Crossroads Reconnect Collaborative Project Work	Youth, CLD Community-specific Agencies
Connect Central Consortium	Youth, Education, Training
Youth Sector Partnering with Transit Guards in Perth	Youth, Transit Guards
Youth Support Coordinators in Schools	Youth/Welfare, Education
Sevenoaks Youth Worker in School	Youth/Welfare, Education
Shellharbour City Council Youth Services Schools Program	Youth, Education
The Yiriman Project	Youth, Indigenous Community, Young Leaders
Mount Gambier City Council	Youth Council, Local Government
Hobson's Bay Youth Voice Committee	Youth Council, Local Government

Who are the partnerships *between*?
In this publication, partnerships have been included within four broad categories, and most of these are inter-sectoral. The following is an attempt to broadly characterise each partnership:

What criteria do we use for 'what works'?
The literature around partnerships suggests several sets of criteria that we have been able to draw on. They include *Guidelines for New Partners, Guiding Principles* to promote best practice collaboration, and *Critical Success Factors [4]* for school and community links.

From this literature, and aware that our projects needed to be selected without the detailed research needed within each local community (there were approximately 300 nominations), the following simplified set of criteria was developed as a check-list to select projects for this publication.

As far as possible, we would select projects that:

» showed some form of **youth participation** at all stages;
» were able to indicate demonstrable **outcomes for young people**;
» were able to indicate demonstrable **outcomes for the partners**;
» had clearly defined locally developed and mutually understood **protocols**, roles and expectations between the partners;
» were committed to a **reflective cycle of evaluation and improvement** ie some formal or informal action research process;
» would provide a **useful story** for other practitioners and active young people to learn from: they had elements that were sustainable and replicable; and
» represented a **diversity** of young people and projects: across states and territories, location (urban, regional, and rural), and groups of young people, including Indigenous; culturally and linguistically diverse; gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered; and inclusive of disability.

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4   See, for example, those terms used, respectively, in Melaville and Blank, 1994; Stokes and Tyler, 1997: 22-23; James, St Leger and Ward, 2001: 205-6

Additionally, all partners needed to agree that this **was** a successful example of a **partnership**, worthy of being held up as 'what works'.

We recognised that, in practice, this list would be highly demanding and we understood we might find very few projects met all of the criteria. But, in selecting projects to approach, we were able to look for examples that, at least, met *several* of the above criteria.

Finally we had to make difficult decisions, for there were many outstanding projects suggested to us. We were not able to include them all in this publication – simply due to the limitation of presenting twelve stories to you.

So it came down to these stories. Not, and we want to emphasise this, simply someone's 'absolutist' idea of twelve 'best projects' or 'best practice' – with the inherent danger of highlighting examples that may be so divorced from our everyday experiences to offer few possibilities for learning. Rather we want to present twelve great and diverse projects that collectively can offer us a range of lessons for our own practice, about **what can work in partnerships in the youth sector**.

Fiona Taylor

Section A:
Partnering with Business and Legal Sectors

The Opal Alliance

THROUGH THE VOICES OF: **BLAIR MCFARLAND, BRUCE MORRIS AND VICKI GILLICK**

Reader Warning: This publication contains images of Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara, and Yankunytjatjara people. Caution should be exercised in reading, as some of these words and photos may be of deceased persons.

The *Opal Alliance* was formed in 2005 between the *Central Australian Youth Link-up Service (CAYLUS)*, the *GPT Group*, and the *Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yanku-nytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council*. The purpose of this partnership was to advocate for the expansion of Federal Government subsidies for non-sniffable Opal Fuel throughout Central Australia and, by so doing, eliminate the practice of petrol sniffing. Their advocacy was successful in 2006.

CAYLUS has operations across the bottom half of the Northern Territory, with an Alice Springs focus. Blair McFarland is the CAYLUS coordinator. He describes the service's work:

"We work to improve the quality of life for young people in remote communities in Alice Springs including addressing substance abuse. We work on supply reduction strategies such as advocating for the roll-out of Opal and having input and helping to set up the NT Volatile Substance Abuse

Prevention Act; setting up dry areas through liaison with communities; dobbing in dealers, at the pointy end of supply reduction; working with retailers in town to reduce the availability of spray paint; and dealing with remote communities to move people on – helping people to understand the Trespass Act. On the demand reduction side, we do holiday and education programs, trying to get people back into school programs. We advocate: we take people from remote areas down to Canberra to advocate to influence policy."

The *GPT Group* is based in Sydney and has business operations in Central Australia, including ownership of the Alice Springs Resort, Longitude 131°, the Kings Canyon Resort and the town of Yulara which contains the Ayers Rock Resort. According to the Group's website *(www.gpt.com.au/gpt/)* the GPT Group "manages resort properties which represent one of the largest portfolios of nature-based assets in Australia."

The *NPY Women's Council* represents women in communities across a 350,000 square kilometre tri-state region of Northern Territory, Western Australia, and South Australia. Its July 2007 *Information Document* tells us:

> *NPY began in 1980. The push for a separate women's forum came about during the South Australian Pitjantjatjara Land Rights struggle of the late 1970s. During consultations over land rights, many women felt that their views were ignored, so they established their own organisation... Anangu and Yarnangu (Aboriginal people) living on the Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara lands (Western Desert language region) share strong cultural and family affiliations.*
>
> *What began as an advocacy organisation is now also a major provider of human services in the region, in essence working to address the needs that clinical health services cannot, and that government agencies do not directly provide in this remote area. NPY has taken this direction because of the glaring needs that exist in member communities. The members' determination to improve the quality of life for families in the region drives the organisation. It is a permanent forum where they are able to raise issues and make their opinions and decisions known. NPY's success is largely due to its capacity to provide a decision-making process steered by the members. One of the major advantages of its existence is the development over time of members' ability to consider and analyse policy issues, deal with government agencies and advocate on their own behalf.*

The Alliance formed by these groups targeted the Central NT area in the Northern Territory north to Tennant Creek, the Far North area of South Australia and, in Western Australia, the Ngaanyatajarra Lands communities (Ngaanyatjarraku Shire), Laverton, Halls Creek and the communities of Kiwirrkurra and Kunawarritji. The area that was finally approved for the subsidised and supported roll-out of unsniffable fuel is smaller but still substantial.

Responding to the reality of substance abuse

The *Opal Alliance* came about in response to strong community concern about substance abuse. Blair McFarland points out the reality of his agency's everyday work:

> "*Young people face multigenerational substance abuse, abject poverty, very poor English, no literacy or numeracy, no stable economic background, chronic illnesses, deafness from ear infection also leading to rheumatic fever, childhood abuse, lots of violence, and inability to access Centrelink payments. The welfare problem isn't that they're living on welfare; it's that they're starving – only supported by inter-community support... [There's] no sense of any future, of anything other than immediate needs and gains. So kids are walking round bored out of their brains and substance abuse looks attractive.*"

Vicki Gillick is Co-ordinator of the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council. She points to the long-term concerns that have been raised by the Council:

> "*Our members have been for many, many years – over 20 years – really distressed and concerned about the level and effects of sniffing: the number of young people with brain damage and physical disabilities, old people having to look after their adult children in wheelchairs with brain injuries from sniffing... A lot of our members have lost kids in their own direct family; everyone's had some relative who has died from sniffing or is permanently brain injured. It's been an absolute scourge in the region, particularly in the NT and SA.*"

Forming the Alliance

Bruce Morris is Hotel and Tourism Portfolio Manager of the GPT Group. He explains that sniffing has been a problem in some of the communities at Yulara for some years, and that this concern led to the formation of the Alliance:

> **"**When the Federal Government and BP launched Opal, we thought: 'This is fantastic; we'll put it into Yulara, and into the service station.' But when we investigated it, we found that we weren't eligible for the subsidy – which means it is 33 cents per litre more expensive. If we wanted to do it, we would have had to take the hit or charge more. The Government just wanted to put it into outback communities. We thought that was ridiculous, and we started talking to people, and decided we wanted to get on board with lobbying the Government for change. We had conversations with CAYLUS and the NPY Women's Council and decided to form a group, the Opal Alliance.**"**

Blair McFarland explains that the Alliance's goal is to stop petrol sniffing. The opportunity was there with the development of Opal.

> **"**We had a solution to petrol sniffing on the supply reduction side, so we went for it just as hard as we could. We got the opportunity to try to influence government policy in relation to Opal. The theory was all there; we all knew it would work immediately and create a window of opportunity to bring in the demand reduction side – programs which address the **reasons** why people are sniffing. It's hard to interest young people in drumming or other activities when they're off their heads.**"**

Strategies

The Alliance adopted four key strategies.

The first was the commissioning of an independent, reputable and conservative **cost-benefit analysis** and this provided the basis for the Alliance's other strategies. Leading health economic consultancy firm Access Economics was commissioned to quantify the cost-benefit of the regional rollout of Opal. The key finding of this research was that, in 2005, petrol sniffing in the Rollout Region was estimated to cost $78.9 million. This independent research was considered critical in building an argument for Government policy change.

Blair McFarland notes that it was important to find a research agency that the government would see as credible. The local agencies provided information, pointed out areas of concern and argued issues with the researchers. They had a lot of say about what went in the report, but it was essential that the report was independent. *"It was **their** decision, **their** professional credibility on the line, and they had to be able to justify each sentence and each statistic."*

Vicki Gillick also notes that there were *"quite a few debates"* with the researchers, because of the lack of information about fuel consumption in the region. *"They wanted to make sure it was really robust,"* she says.

The second strategy employed by the *Opal Alliance* was to deliberately lobby the Federal Government in a manner that **allowed the government to take credit**. This was an essential aspect of their approach. *"We didn't bite the hand that feeds us,"* says Blair, *"we encouraged it."* Bruce Morris's advice and role was critical here. This approach involved key advocacy work in Canberra, seeing bureaucrats and politicians, *"making sure they were all on the same page."* When the Access Economics Report was released, they gave copies to the bureaucrats to make sure they saw it before the media did. The response from departmental officials was positive – that the cost-benefit analysis was what they needed to influence Treasury.

Vicki notes that it was important to *"work with them and try to be persuasive – not go in with our jackboots on. It was a matter of putting up cogent arguments."*

Bruce Morris notes:

" *In terms of people modifying their behaviour, we probably took a much more supportive approach to the Government, rather than bashing them over the head. We felt that it was necessary to bring them along for the ride. People have to leave their baggage at the door and just work with whoever is in power in a productive way.* "

A Senate Inquiry also provided a good media opportunity. When the Inquiry came to Alice Springs, the Alliance drove them out to Yuendemu as part of a broader strategy of making allies where they could. This ensured that the Federal Government moved step by step to where the Alliance members wanted them to be.

The conciliatory approach of the Alliance was backed up by the compassion that the NPY women brought to the lobbying. Blair points out:

" *Another strength from the Indigenous domain was the sea of compassion that the NPY women brought to the equation. When Tony Abbott said he wanted to come to the Pit-lands and visit, they said: 'We're so glad; he can help us look after the young men in wheelchairs – help us feed them and bathe them.' A wave of compassion and reality: a 'sitting in the dust' reality; a lovely position of inclusion and acceptance.* "

Throughout the political lobbying and media campaign run by the *Opal Alliance*, both NPY and CAYLUS were able to contribute stories from the grassroots. They were careful however, to include **both positive and heartbreaking stories**.

At the meetings in Canberra, the role of the community agencies was to bring anecdotes – the kind of stories and evidence that were found persuasive or of interest. Good news stories drew attention – politicians were looking for hope as human beings. When told the bad side, their eyes would glaze over: they'd heard it a thousand times. Stories where people would rise up: you could see both politicians and departmental officials collecting **those** stories.

These were teaching stories – that showed co-operation and partnership between community and Government, and these were what people wanted to hear.

An example of telling a good news story:

Lance McDonald, the President of Papunya Council told the story of how, after Opal came in, more and more sniffers were accumulating in Papunya, closest to sniffable petrol.

"There were 100 sniffers in Papunya two years ago, then the roll out went past it and the numbers went down to 40; they were finding it harder to get petrol. We did a meeting, a positive one, saying: 'The government has passed this law that you can ban petrol from your community. Do you want to?'

"They had power. There was lots of debate, with three translators. Every issue was well and truly aired and, in the end, they decided to try and ban petrol, and went away feeling really good. We'd told them the white fella system would take a year, but don't wait.

"So they called together the sniffers the next day and Lance told them all: 'You've got to put your cans down and play football.' They did; they spoke to them really respectfully. They put their cans down in March or April, and played football all winter. They were one of the worst teams before and went on to win the premiership. They were so exultant; it became a shame in the community because they realised how much it had been holding them back."

An example of telling heartbreaking stories from the grass-roots:

"Now listen, I know some of you have heard about petrol sniffing, but where I come from every single family has a family member affected by petrol sniffing, and we now have a terrible problem on our hands. When our young people sniff petrol they develop all sorts of health problems, such as mental health problems, heart and lung problems and acquired brain injuries. Petrol sniffers sniff all night and do not rest and this affects the whole family.

"Anangu families are exhausted. These petrol sniffers are our own flesh and blood, yet we have lost them all to petrol ... Of course we know that some petrol sniffers cannot be helped. They will live their lives in wheelchairs with acquired brain injuries. But for the new recruits ... well we are hoping that with Opal there will be no new recruits to petrol sniffing."

Janet Inyika *

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* NPY Women's Council member and resident of Amata community, SA, launching Opal fuel with Health Minister Tony Abbott, Adelaide, February 2005. Translation by Linda Rive, NPY Women's Council.

Finally, the Opal Alliance succeeded because of its approach of a long and strategic campaign and the **perseverance** of all parties involved. Bruce says: *"People need to persevere on things, but it's amazing how things turn pretty quickly. In terms of people coming together, they need to understand it's a two, three or more year project. You get out of it what you put into it."*

Outcomes for Young People:

There have been two significant outcomes for young people: a massive reduction in petrol sniffing, and the creation of a window of opportunity (and increased funding) for demand reduction programs.

While the roll-out of Opal is still occurring, there has already been a very rapid, **massive reduction in petrol sniffing** across Central Australia. Blair notes that there is now 95% less sniffing in remote communities. *"People*

have more energy. I wake up in the morning with happiness in my heart from all those kids not sniffing petrol." He also recognises that the empowerment of communities has contributed to this:

> *One of the side effects of the Opal Alliance was that people in communities were really empowered by it. They felt like they were part of making it happen. They are now really holding the line as a community, and sending sniffers out bush*

Others also recognise these changes. John Wilson, Health Services Manager for Nganampa Health Council commented that:

> *The lack of availability of sniffable fuels ... is likely to be a major contributing factor to what appears to be a sustained reduction over the past twelve months in petrol sniffing.*

Consequently, there now exists **a window of opportunity, and increased funding, for demand reduction programs.**

It remains to be seen whether adequate and effective resourcing will be provided to take advantage of the opportunity created by the near elimination of sniffing across communities. However, the cost-benefit analysis deliberately included the costs of diversionary or demand reduction programs, arguing that "well-implemented supplementary demand reduction policies are essential to accompany supply reduction policies."[1]

The Department of Health and Ageing was also adamant that a supply reduction approach alone wasn't enough and committed to funding follow-up demand reduction programs. Blair notes that when Ministers argued that Opal didn't address the underlying causes, *"we agreed with them that the underlying issues needed to be addressed, and provided costings for the youth services."* These costings, and the model it was based on: 'Good Practice in Youth Development', became the model that was eventually put to tender.

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1   Opal Cost Benefit Analysis, Access Economics, February 2006: pp 63-64

What Works in the Opal Alliance Partnership?

The *Opal Alliance* partners identify three specific learnings as contributing to the success of their work together: building trust, strengths and community ownership.

First, each of the partners talked passionately about the role played by **trust, a mutually decided strategy and a shared intent** in making the partnership functional. Blair points to the importance of an agreed media and advocacy strategy. *"We agreed on it and stuck to it, which created trust. GPT didn't look in the media every morning wondering what they'd got into."* The strategies had been worked out beforehand and Vicki notes: *"We knew what we were trying to achieve, and just kept at it."* Blair and Vicki recognise that Bruce was the most diplomatic in ways of working with Government. Bruce says:

> "*You have to listen and demonstrate that you're taking everyone's opinions into account, particularly if you bring people in from a business environment... You need to have a cooperative and open approach – keeping an open mind and being willing to listen to people, trying to build consensus; truly digging deeper, exploring to find a better outcome.*
>
> *You have to do what you say you'll do... there has to be a sense that you're trusting them to do it. You don't want someone representing it differently to government or others. This needs to be explicitly explained within the group.*"

The second clear learning from the *Opal Alliance* is that, when there is shared respect between partners, the partnership can **make use of the different strengths of each partner.**

Blair says:

> "*it worked because business did what good business is good at – getting the job done, not getting swamped by the emotions of the field, being able to set timelines and stick to them – providing a real structure; and the community agencies did what they*

are good at – providing the strength of advocates who could talk in Canberra and to the media about their own lives and those of their communities and families.*"*

From a business point of view, Bruce also talks of the challenges and strengths of working in partnership:

> "*I had an expectation of participation as opposed to just reliance on us – that each would bring their own experience to bear. This certainly occurred. We all, from time to time, had to temper our approach, including me. If you were dealing with it in isolation, I would do things my way, and vice versa. We had many debates about how to do it the best way and often came up with a better solution by keeping an open mind, and not being dogmatic.*
>
> *We delegated the work around to who was best suited to what job. Vicky was skilful at writing and editing press releases; Blair did contacting people work. We all brought our own set of skills to the table. The combination of their coal-face experience with sniffing, with communities, with what would work or has been tried, together with our skills – that was a good combination.*
>
> *It worked quite well that we weren't homogenous. We used that as a strength: we'd flag the great example of private sector in partnership, which the government love. We didn't manipulate, apart from a general theme that we wanted to be supportive, not critical, of government...*
>
> *The things we really enjoyed and saw in partnering with the other groups was that they had lots of coal-face experience, and were very well connected in the NT community. They were able to test a lot of the assumptions we were making, to look at them and say: 'Well no, that's not right.' That was very powerful when we got in front of senior people in Government in Canberra. For example: the level that petrol sniffing had infiltrated certain communities: there is not a lot of hard data, but these people are in communities and able to give feedback on what they saw. Or another example: decision makers would say: 'If we put Opal into these communities, it wouldn't*

make any difference.' Their experience dealing with the elders in these communities provided feedback that, if fuel was removed, it was very likely that sniffing would be almost entirely removed.

There were a number of instances where someone said our information was wrong, that sniffing is not an issue in these areas, and Vicky could say: 'I was there last week.' It gave it a lot of credibility. "

The community agencies were the agents for generating support on the ground and for forming alliances with many communities. In particular, NPY brought grass-roots experience, community connections and support from the perspective of women in communities (many of which aren't covered by the work of CAYLUS), and the perspective of being primary health care providers.

The business partner, the GPT Group, brought money – they funded the Access Economics Cost benefit Study – access to government, and a strategic, efficient mode of operating. Bruce recognises:

We tried to bring a degree of structured organisation to how we went about the advocacy. We brought a business overlay with formal meetings and minutes. To some degree, we also brought that big business has an easier time in getting in front of senior people in government than do non-government organisations or senior people in Indigenous organisations, where there is more suspicion.

The third learning we can gain from the *Opal Alliance* is the importance and effectiveness of **community ownership** of the action and its outcomes.

Everyone involved in remote communities felt like part of a bigger community of people who were concerned and taking action. When success happened, they also felt like a part of that success. Because of all the work that the Alliance done with the communities pre-Opal, Blair points out that *"it didn't feel like just white fellas putting a different fuel in cars. We'd all fought really hard: we'd won and we'd won together."*

In Summary:

The **Opal Alliance** was formed between the GPT Group, the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council and the Central Australian Youth Link-up Service (CAYLUS) to advocate for the expansion of Federal Government subsidies for non-sniffable Opal Fuel throughout Central Australia. Such an expansion aims to eliminate the practice of petrol sniffing. Their advocacy was successful in 2006.

The partners identify three specific learnings from the success of the **Opal Alliance**:

» **The need for trust, a mutually decided strategy and a shared intent;**
» **Making use of the different strengths of each partner; and**
» **Having community ownership.**

Construction of the Youth Arts Warehouse
Regional Youth Support Services, Gosford

THROUGH THE VOICES OF: **KIM MCLOUGHRY** (RYSS SERVICE MANAGER) AND **RAY SOUTHEREN** (GOSFORD NORTH ROTARIAN) WITH COMMENTS FROM: **SHANNON AND SHONA** (PEER EDUCATORS), **LIZ CARTER** (YOUTH ARTS CO-ORDINATOR), **GLENYS TORY** (INTERLYNK LOUNGE YOUTH PROJECT WORKER) AND **FRAN WHITE** (PARKSIDE MANAGER)

A unique local partnership in Gosford enabled a youth facility to be upgraded to provide a Youth Arts Space – a large music venue, sound recording studio and arts studio space with disabilities access. The construction took five years of consultations, lobbying and submissions – as well as practical work – from youth agencies in partnership with local Rotary clubs and businesses.

The geographic dispersal of the NSW Central Coast means that many young people suffer the effects of isolation on low income. The little affordable entertainment that exists is generally inaccessible by public transport, especially outside weekday business hours.

Shona is 19 years old, She has been active at Regional Youth Support Services (RYSS) in Gosford for six years, and is a member of Indent Central Coast. She reports some of the consequences of this isolation:

"We need more activities for young people to be involved with during the day. A lot of people have dropped out of school and haven't got anywhere to go. There's not much to do, so they end up hanging round the shops and getting in trouble from shop owners. There needs to be something for them to do during the day. Also, there's really nothing for people under 18 to do over the weekend. It's really hard to get to things that are on in the other towns, so we need more things here in Gosford."

Kim McLoughry is Manager of the RYSS. She provides some background to the partnership:

"I'd been working on the project for a youth arts space since 1998 but didn't have the money & partners to do it. Initially a Rotarian named John Spath (the owner of Jeskah Steel) said to me: 'This will happen and we need to get the ball rolling.' I thought: 'If he believes that this major construction can happen,

then it can.' I got a Federal Government Regional Partnerships grant for $150,000 for the lift and stairs. We got some local government funding, then some funding from the State Government, Newcastle Permanent Building Society and Clubs. One bit of support led to another. "

The Partners

The local partnership that was created, involved youth agencies, businesses and local Rotary. They are:

» Parkside, a co-located, multi-service youth centre, located in central Gosford. There are currently ten independent youth services located at Parkside including the Regional Youth Support Services (RYSS) and the Youth Arts Warehouse (YAW).

» Regional Youth Support Services (RYSS), a focal point of access on the Central Coast for high quality services, resources and facilities specifically tailored to people aged 12 to 25 years. One of RYSS's functions is to encourage a greater awareness, harmony and understanding of issues that are important to young people. It maintains a staff of professional youth workers to foster social and support networks with young people and to make available assessment, information and referral services. RYSS coordinated this project and the partnership.

» Central Coast Rotary Clubs, the local organisations of business and professional leaders who provide humanitarian, educational and cultural exchange services worldwide and within local communities. Gosford Rotary, Gosford North Rotary, and the Rotary Club of Terrigal were invaluable project supporters.

» Local Sponsors, including Jeskah Steel (project management) and Raybal Building Services (site/project management) as well as Parkside Gosford Ltd, Bunnings Warehouse, ACE Access and Scaffolds, Active Hire Group, Economy Waste Services, Plaster Master, Walker Bros Timber, Waters Cranes, Fletcher Insulation (Insulco), Sky Dome, Lakes Tiles, Stephen Moore Architect, Neometro Architects and Planners, Wattyl Paints, Gosford City Council and WorkWise Central Coast Inc 'Work for the Dole' crew. Financial sponsors were Regional Partnerships (Department of Transport and Regional Services), Arts NSW (capital and co-ordinator), Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation and Clubs NSW (Woy Woy Leagues Club).

These partnerships were set up to convert the top floor of the Parkside Youth Building into a Youth Arts Space, and to undertake this project using community donations and goodwill in order to minimise costs. In turn, the goals of the Youth Arts Space are to provide creative opportunities for young people aged 12 to 24 years. "Our main aim is to provide a link for young people interested in the Arts at secondary and other entry levels, providing training and opportunities that will enhance their future professional possibilities in the arts."[1] RYSS also talks of empowering young people: "giving them a chance to have a voice and a role within their own community as well as ownership" as well as providing a facility that builds the cultural profile of the whole Central Coast community and that enhances arts opportunities with a priority of use to young people.

Strategies

In developing and pursuing the partnership that achieved this Youth Arts Space, three main strategies were used.

A critical strategy in this project was to **bring together people with business and community influence into a community-based Steering Committee to direct the construction**. The members of the steering committee were either overseers of the construction process, seeking funds, or volunteer labour and assistance from throughout the Central Coast community. The Steering Committee meant that the operation was efficient and cost effective. It consisted of Ray Southeren from Gosford North Rotary Club, John Spath from Terrigal Rotary Club, Peter Atkinson from RAYBAL Construction, Fran White from Parkside, Liz Carter from RYSS and Kim McLoughry from RYSS. The Steering Committee reported back to the

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1   RYSS June 2006: 'Youth Arts Warehouse' - newsletter

Management Committee of RYSS.

Fran White, Parkside Manager, describes the operation of this Steering Committee:

> *The partnership was basically for getting the building done, working out who was responsible for each job. Each meeting was basically: 'What's the next stage? Who's responsible for that? What do I have to do to make sure that happens without affecting the other tenants of the building? Who's going to pay for it? What's the result? It was weekly phases of co-ordinating the building.*

Each partner contributed his or her time and expertise voluntarily. Additionally, they accessed their networks and connections within the community to generate donations and cheap materials. Kim reports:

> *The biggest benefit was having a genuine partnership evolve with lasting relationships. The second benefit was a massive cost saving. The project management over more than 12 months was done for free. Most of the other partners contributed materials, or asked others to contribute materials. We didn't pay commercial rates for anything.*

The Steering Committee also gave access to expertise that couldn't have been bought. Ray Southeren from Gosford North Rotary Club was on the Partnership Steering Committee. He explains Rotary's interest and role:

> *Rotary has an aim to help the community generally, and young people particularly. Our club has been focused on that over the years. Rotary has the advantage of being able to slip in and do the things that others can't do – little things; if there is something to clean up, we can get half a dozen guys to clean out the centre before building started. We've got the manpower to do the jobs that fall between the cracks, using our business expertise. Because Rotary is not an individual, we bring a whole lot of talents. We've got contacts, talents and skills in the business community.*

The culture of the Steering Committee was business-like, although friendly – because everyone was volunteering. *"It was very business-like – a lot like board meetings in corporations,"* explains Ray. *"A problem came up: it was discussed and a solution to deal with it was agreed. It was always a consensus: we never voted."*

Secondly, RYSS is committed to maximising youth participation in their programs. They were keen for the Youth Arts Warehouse development to **consult with young people about their wants and needs and involve them in the stages they chose**. There were three key aspects of this:

Young people owning the idea of the Youth Arts Warehouse: The initial dreaming and planning stages for the Warehouse were highly participatory and, as a result, young people who have been involved long-term at RYSS have a high degree of ownership of the project. Kim points out that:

> *Young people were involved in planning for this partnership over many years. We had many opportunities to do a thorough consultation with the young people. We discovered that young people needed more recreation: recreation that was safe, drug and alcohol free, affordable, and accessible.*

Shona was involved in this consultation:

> *A couple of years ago we were always saying that we wouldn't mind something happening upstairs. So all the youth around here put in our ideas about what we'd like to have happen up there.*

Shannon is 21 years old, has been active at RYSS for six years, and says: *"I'm happy just that I've contributed and that it did start with one of us saying: 'Why don't you do something with this space?'"*

Young people determining the key features of the space:
While the space was being built, RYSS asked some of their youth leaders to conduct a video survey of what young people in the region would like the space to offer. Young people were trained to do video interviews across seven different local youth events during Youth Week, asking: 'What are the biggest youth needs on the Central coast, directly related to what the Youth Art Warehouse could offer?' Shona also remembers that they asked: 'How far would you travel to be able to spend a whole day doing what you want?' The results of the survey about young people's ideas for the space were taken to RYSS and to the sponsors, including the Rotary clubs.

Liz Carter, Youth Arts Coordinator at RYSS, reports that this consultation showed positive responses to the idea of a Youth Arts Space. Not only would young people be able to travel to events, but they would be able to fund activities such as attending concerts. She says:

"*The majority of the young people were really excited by the concept. It started them off having inspiring thoughts about how they could become involved in the arts areas: young guys at the skate competition talking about making their own skating video clips for example.* "

While they were involved in these consultations and research, young people did not sit on the project Steering Committee; as such, they were not formally partners in the process. This was considered at one stage, says Kim, but since meetings were at 7.30 am, it was not thought practical. However, *"we made very sure they knew what was happening at every stage and that they were quite engaged in the process."* The young people similarly note that, as Shona says, *"We didn't get involved in that part, but it was nice to involve the kids in what they wanted and show that we do want them here…"* and Shannon adds:

"*I don't mind that we weren't more involved with the steering group, 'cos without our ideas it wouldn't exist. They had to get the money and the licensing; we're glad we didn't have to do that. I know I would have thought that was a bit boring. We got involved again when the end product was ready. We had a big party, an official opening and then one for the kids the week after.*"

RYSS also saw themselves as advocating for young people's views throughout. Liz Carter reports:

"*I sat in on the morning meetings and would put forward the views of the young people. I would advocate for the young people and would feed back to them dates of completion and progress updates. I had the process of the build videoed for them; the same video artist came in every week and at certain points we played that back, so we kept them up to date with the process. They were able to visualise the process. I also used that footage at stakeholder meetings with artists. The warehouse had been spoken about for more than five years, so people didn't think it was going to happen, so I felt like I had to show them footage to prove it was and get the community excited and behind us.*"

Young people active in running the space: Young people continue to be actively involved in the programming of the space. A Central Coast Indent [2] group have started to organise music events there. This involved application for funding, and then mentoring in event management. Liz Carter explains:

"*As the Youth Arts Coordinator, I try to implement a space where the young people have mentoring throughout the process, so they get to experience event management. There are always a lot of staff around on the events so the young people feel supported: how to stage manage, representatives from work cover to explain OH&S within the venue, technicians to show them how the equipment is turned on and off, how to coil microphone leads etc. Some of the young people were trained in the 'Save a mate' program, so at an event they can identify someone who needs a Youth Worker's help. We go through the budget with all them also, so they are aware of all the elements of how to run an event. The Indent crew help out with other events; they have become the RYSS/Youth Arts Warehouse crew and are the face of the Youth Arts Warehouse.*"*

Glenys Tory is a Youth Worker at RYSS. She points to the crucial role played by these young people and their skills in contacting other young people:

"*Without the input of the skills that these young people have, in being able to tap into their peers and bringing to the table the specific wants and needs of young people, then we wouldn't have the success that we have now. No matter how hard I try, there is a generation gap. What **I** think young people want is totally different to **their** ideas, their enthusiasms. Each young person that is here has specific skills to contribute: one is really good at promotions, one is really good at public speaking, one is really good at connecting with and motivating the teens.*"*

The final strategy involved **liaison with regional cultural planners**. Planning for the use of the Youth Arts Warehouse occurred alongside the construction phase, bringing in the goodwill and expertise of a regional

cultural network. Liz Carter points out that: "*setting up the Youth Arts Warehouse is not just a building, but making something that works for a community.*" She reports a statement from the Gosford cultural planner: "*setting up the Youth Arts Warehouse could be like having a body but without the blood pumping through the veins.*" That meant a concentration on how they were going to use equipment and spaces and how that would enable them to reach out to the community. So the input from the *Cultural Development Officers (Gosford & Wyong)* was crucial.

Outcomes for Young People

There are two main outcomes for young people from this project: the **construction of the youth arts space** itself, and e**nhanced social capital**, through connection with community members.

Young people expressed a need for recreational activities and, in particular, for more all-age music events, which have been met with the **construction of the Youth Arts Space**. Schools, TAFE and community groups are running art and other youth programs during the day in the space, and in the evenings and over the weekends there are many other events. More than 2800 young people used the facility in the first 10 months. A partnership with TAFE Outreach presents a creative program within the art space that engages marginalised young people.

Shona reports that the main outcome has been that: "*a lot of kids said they wanted music events, and those kids and their friends show up; the tickets are really affordable.*" There is a big music event every couple of weeks, plus youth forums and other community events that are free or affordable to young people, and the Youth Arts

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2   Indent is a NSW grant scheme for young people organising music events.

Warehouse is also hired out for selected private events.

Liz Carter points out that the Youth Arts Warehouse is *"creating new artistic, cultural and recreational opportunities for youth and emerging artists on the Central Coast"* but that it is also *"allowing young people a voice."*

The partnership model is continuing into the programming of the Youth Arts Warehouse. For example RYSS has partnered with 'Celebrate Safely' for events. Glenys Tory explains:

" *When we work in partnership, it's about empowering young people to want to celebrate safely, in a safe environment that is drug and alcohol free, where they can come and participate in varied and diverse activities. Without partnerships, the best service couldn't be provided.* "

In addition to the physical outcome of the provision of the Youth Arts Warehouse, there have been outcomes for young people in the enhanced relationships between the broader community and the youth centre and its active young people. This is particularly true for young peer educators within RYSS, who have a sense of ownership and pride in their achievement. Glenys Tory reports that: *"Training our older young people up into peer educators has really enhanced their self esteem and their feeling of contribution to the community. They've gone from be-ing clients to being peer educators and volunteers at the service. It's about making them feel valued and recognising the skills that they have."*

There has also been a process of challenging negative stereotypes about young people amongst the business and Rotarian participants. Together, these mean that there is an **enhancement of the social capital of young people through connection with community members**. RYSS is optimistic that the cultural events being organised in the space by and for young people will continue to counter prevalent stereotypes.

Ray Southeren points out:

" *When I talk to my fellow Rotarians about this project, they think a youth space is going to be full of 'druggies'. After talking to them for a while, you can convince them it's the opposite – that it's going to be a positive thing in the community, not a negative. When they hear that, they are happy to be involved... It challenges their stereotypes to meet young people like that.* "

The process of youth workers, business and community leaders working together has developed ongoing relationships within the community, which have generated support and broader responsibility for the success of the Youth Arts Warehouse. Kim points out that the Steering Committee provided the basis for on-going relationships: *"I like the fact that the relationships have continued on since then. The stakeholders and individuals will continue on with the development in the future. There is a sustainable community partnership."*

What Worked in the Youth Arts Warehouse Partnership?

Four important lessons have been identified as contributing to the success of this partnership.

First, this project was straightforward in its goals and there was no attempt by any partner to subvert or change this common purpose: **all partners had a clear and common purpose**. Kim points out that: *"We all shared a common goal. Partnering is supported by people who have a genuine belief in the project, which brings you in whole heartedly; we all had that passion."* This clear and common purpose could be enhanced by the development of good relationships and flexibility amongst the

partners. Kim describes relationships between partners:

" *It can only work if you get along, which needs people who can negotiate, be diplomatic when you don't agree, be flexible, have to roll with different outcomes. You also need people with effective approaches to troubleshooting.* "

Whilst Kim claims that she didn't generate support for this project through appealing to abstract concepts of community responsibility, it achieved success because each partner and contributor did have or developed this sense of shared responsibility. Combined with this deeper commitment, the partners from outside the youth sector were extremely well placed to bring support and credibility to the project. The learning is then about how to **involve community minded people with business influence and know-how**. Over many years, Kim has taken a proactive approach to seeking support from local Rotary Clubs. This facilitated the involvement of several clubs in this partnership. She explains:

" *I frequently go out advocating for young people at Rotary Clubs. I go with the optimism of what we can do for change. Many of them are true to that charter of community service and I press them that that should start at home. I work with many Clubs whose members are over 65, a few with negative impressions or attitudes to young people. I try to turn it around to look at the positive things young people do. I may not change their attitudes but they have been very supportive in setting up this space. That's the great thing about the Youth Arts Warehouse: it provides fantastic opportunities for young people to be truly productive and shape their community.* "

Ray suggests that the success of this project in generating such community support may have been more straightforward in regional areas. *"It's easier to pull things and people together than in a capital city. It's easier to identify with the community, because people want to own it. In regional areas people live, work, socialise within the community."* He suggests that Rotarians should involve more members in direct contact with a youth agency, in order to broaden their commitment.

" *The first advice I would give to other Rotary Clubs considering being involved in a similar project is: do it, be involved. Be involved in the levels that you feel that your club's talents can most serve. Remember that you've got to be in there for the long haul. There's no point thinking you can tackle these projects in the short term. Every Rotary club is completely different; some don't want to be involved at all – they just raise money and contribute. Others don't have money but do the manual work.* "

This partnership can demonstrate the effectiveness of sharing positive, human outcomes with partners to ensure their satisfaction and ongoing advocacy for the project. It also demonstrates that it is useful to provide rewards by **connecting partners to the positive outcomes for young people and by providing positive publicity**.

Kim explains that RYSS held a 'Thank You to the Stakeholders' celebration to show them how significant their role in this project had been. They provided display certificates and started a newsletter with statistics and pictures showing and demonstrating the highlights of youth participation and events run in the Youth Arts Warehouse. *"We wanted to make sure there was full acknowledgement of everyone's contribution,"* she says. *"We did lots of press releases, emphasising that our sponsors were good, local, user-friendly businesses."* Liz Carter adds that: *"We talk to other people about the partners; we recommend them to other people. We tell others about how the manager of the building took us on, how it was built with a lot of love, and with a spirit that we couldn't have captured with lots of money."*

This partnership also demonstrates the value of their approach to **youth participation,** which was to enable participation of young people in areas and on levels they wanted, and that made sense to them. Shona notes the importance of *"involving us in what they can; if they can involve us they make sure they do. They'll talk to us about what we want, and whether we'd want to be involved."* Similarly Shannon advises: *"Keep the youth involved, really involved – even if they don't want to get involved in the business bit."*

Liz Carter points out:

"*Young people being involved in the process is about consultation being paramount to any development in any community. You need to know whether something is going to be utilised or valued. You need to know what the young people want – what they need. You take what the young people need and also the identity of the area – that's where you do your consultation with your stakeholders. You must also consult with your community and get them involved and behind you. Community growth, development and ownership can only be achieved when you consult every sector of the community, including local businesses.*

*The Youth Arts Warehouse would not be such a special, youth-driven, up and coming Arts venue without our dedicated young crew, who are prepared to put themselves out, represent their voices as young people, and represent Regional Youth Support Services. My advice to other communities wanting to involve young people to set up a project like this, would be to speak to the young people, and to work with them. They are very valuable – not the future generation but the **now** generation!*"

Finally, Ray Southeren sums up the key to the partnership's success:

"*What works is having a common goal. You're all pulling in the same direction. More or less like having a business plan: 'What's the end product?'; the aim of the steering group is to get there. The rest of it flowed from that. None of us were experts but we all brought our own talents to it.*"

In Summary:

After five years of consultations, lobbying and various submissions, a unique collection of partners brought the construction of a Youth Arts Warehouse in Gosford to fruition. The Regional Partnerships Program and the NSW Ministry for the Arts, along with local Rotary Clubs and businesses, came together to enable the second storey of the Parkside space (a youth co-location) to be upgraded to provide a large music venue, sound recording studio and arts studio space with disabilities access.

The partners identify three specific learnings as being critical to their success:
The partners identify three specific learnings from the success of the **Opal Alliance**:

» All partners have a **clear and common purpose**;
» The partnership **involves community minded people with business influence and know how**;
» It connects partners to the **positive outcomes for young people**; and
» There is **active youth participation**.

A Youth-Legal Partnership

The Parramatta Children's Court Assistance Scheme

THROUGH THE VOICES OF: **TIM KHOO, STAN SMALL AND AARON TANG**

Imagine you're a young person arriving in court for the first time. What do you do? Where do you go? What should you say? Are you feeling anxious?

Now imagine, as an alternative, that there's someone there to support you and provide information and introductions. The Parramatta Children's Court Assistance Scheme (PCCAS) is a welfare-legal sector partnership that does just that: it provides support to young people appearing on criminal charges at the Parramatta Children's Court.

The PCAAS was formerly known as the Lidcombe Children's Court Assistance Scheme, until the Children's Court was shifted to Parramatta in November 2006. The Macquarie Legal Centre began the scheme, and continues to auspice it and another in Bidura (in inner-city Sydney). There are other similar schemes across New South Wales, auspiced by other Community Legal Centres.

The Macquarie Legal Centre describes the partnership's activities:

Support Workers provide information about Court processes and outcomes, informal counselling and conflict resolution as well as referral to welfare services such as drug and alcohol programs, counselling and accommodation. Volunteer support workers, under the supervision of the scheme's coordinators, work with young people and their families on the day of Court, both before and after the actual Court appearance. [1]

As a result, young people should feel less alienated from the justice system (as questions are answered and anxieties addressed), there should be greater cohesion between young offenders and their families (through informal conflict resolution and counselling), young people should have increased understanding of orders and their consequences, and that young people are referred to appropriate community programs.

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1   http://macquarielegal.org.au/ccas.htm - Macquarie Legal Centre website (accessed 16/10/2007)

History

Nick Manning is from the Youth Action and Policy Association of NSW (YAPA) and was a former Youth Education Worker at the Macquarie Legal Centre. He describes the Scheme's beginning in 1994-5:

I was working with the children's solicitor at the Macquarie Legal Centre, training youth workers to work in the legal system, primarily in the Children's Court system and in dealing with police. We were trying to work out how to get better outcomes for young people in the Court system via youth workers.

"*We applied to what was then called the Law Foundation of NSW (now the Law and Justice Foundation of NSW). They gave us a one-off grant to employ a worker to set it up for a year and a half. The funding then continued over eight years, through six to eight different one-off funding sources until it got recurrent funding in 2005, when the Attorney General's Department decided to fund it, and roll the scheme out to other Children's Courts.*

At the beginning we hired an experienced youth worker to set it up. We also put out the call to all youth service agencies in the catchment area, saying: 'Why don't you put up a worker?' We started a training course, which involved lots of role-plays, then set them loose.

Each time we called for volunteers from youth agencies, we got enough people to put together a roster, with each working a day a fortnight or month. A year or two down the track, we employed Vik and Stan as co-ordinators at the Court on each day. There needed to be experienced people there each day to help the less experienced youth workers and to deal with high-level conflict with Court officials (which happens less these days). Both have a street-work background so have the skills to engage young people in those environments."

How the Scheme Works:
The Story of One Young Person

When I arrived at the Court, the client, a 13-year-old Vietnamese boy, was sitting in a corner with his aging father. When I asked him if he wanted help, he said 'yes', then translated for his father, who had little English. The boy was nervous and scared, because he'd been told by the police that he'd probably be locked up. He had been charged with drug-related offences and had been to Court before on another charge. He had been given little information from the police or the legal system - and the father knew nothing.

The client lived alone with his father. The mother left them and went to the USA over five years ago. His grandmother had been looking after him but she died about a year ago, as did his grandfather. There was lots of grief for both the father and son - there was little support from friends, and almost no family. The boy started using and selling drugs this year, but he's trying to stop with the help of the family doctor. He has been doing well at school, but is now truanting a lot. He wants his dad to be proud of him. Basically a polite, nice kid.

As the support worker, I spoke to the family doctor and an auntie as well as to the client and his dad. Because the Duty Solicitor had not spent much time and knew little of the background situation, I spoke with the Solicitor also. I then wrote a letter for the Duty Solicitor to present to the magistrate in Court explaining that I would arrange for the client and his father to see a Vietnamese social worker. The Court agreed to adjourn the case for a month.

In the four weeks following, the family saw me and the social worker. We arranged for the client to stay with his auntie and for his father - who works long hours and often at night - to pick the client up and drop him off at school. The father has agreed to decrease his working hours so he can spend more time with his son. I have also spoken at length with the school Principal who had been wondering whether to bring in DOCS - and who is now trying to support the new arrangements.

We have letters explaining what is happening for the Court - and we will find out what happens to the client at Court next week.

(Janys Young, Court Support Worker, 25/10/96 *)

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* Excerpt from: Blume, Lane (1996) *Lidcombe Children's Court Assistance Scheme Evaluation*. Marrickville: Lane Blume Training and Development Services

Strategies

Three inter-related strategies are crucial to the success of the Parramatta Children's Court Assistance Scheme. Workers and volunteers provide appropriate referrals and a friendly presence, and decode the legal process.

Firstly, the youth workers and volunteers in the assistance scheme are resourced to **provide appropriate welfare referrals to young people facing Court.**

Because the Parramatta Children's Court has a very large catchment area, the volunteer on duty each day needs to refer young people to services across Western Sydney. This requires a high level of knowledge of available services and an understanding and trust that the services provided will meet young people's needs. The scheme has thus served as a network with the core purpose of linking workers in the Children's Court Assistance Scheme, and has a side-effect of creating positive working relationships across the region.

Stan Small is Co-ordinator of Youth Services (Street Outreach) for Anglicare Children's and Family Services, Parramatta, and Co-ordinator of the PCCAS. He notes:

> "We have the resources from the community that we know and work within personally – because there are so many of us involved. The Court scheme has brought workers from seven Local Government Areas together. We then created relationships with each of these workers and opened up our knowledge of service providers across South West Sydney on a first name basis. Now we've gotten to know each other's services. "

Secondly, the Court Assistance Scheme workers **provide a friendly presence at Court**. PCCAS has an office at the Parramatta Children's Court. Its workers generally manage the list of clients to be seen by the Legal Aid lawyers, and keep track of which case is occurring in each Court. Young people and their families in the waiting area are approached in a friendly manner, and asked if they would like any assistance. Because of their youth work training and experience, PCCAS workers are able to relate to young people in an egalitarian manner, and can thus act as a bridge and model with lawyers and Court staff (including security guards) to encourage good communication and productive relationships.

Tim Khoo is Youth Education Officer, Macquarie Legal Centre. He describes this process:

> "We try to just talk to all the young people and be youth workers without necessarily looking like youth workers: just chatting, rather than going directly to 'what can I help you with?' If something comes up during the course of the discussion that you can help them with, that's great because they don't realise you've helped them."

Thirdly, due to their training and experience over time in working within the Court, the PCCAS workers are able to **decode the legal process** so that young people understand what's happening and are empowered to make informed decisions. PCCAS workers are also able to make sure young people fully understand the implications of a sentence, for example the consequences of violating bail conditions. Stan Small points to the clarifying role they play within legal processes:

> "The main role is supporting young people through the legal process, explaining the legal terms and jargon, what bail means etc. Most of the workers at the Court know who we are, and rely on us to be a cog in the process. The solicitors come to ask who their clients are; we get the legal aid forms filled out; Court staff ask us to explain Court processes to people the first time in Court. "

Outcomes for Young People

The Court assistance scheme has resulted in three main positive outcomes for young people: reducing stress, improving access to youth and welfare services, and improving legal outcomes.

Like most people, many young people experience extreme anxiety when facing Court. This anxiety is not only uncomfortable on the day, but can lead to young people expressing themselves poorly to lawyers and magistrates, coming across aggressively in Court, being abusive to family or Court staff and consequently being removed from the Court or leaving before their Court appearance. The PCCAS workers' first outcome is therefore to **reduce the stress of attending Court** for many young people.

Spinning confused, I don't know what to do
What do I say, no one to talk to
Then all of a sudden I feel a firm grip
Shown exactly what to do
Given some good tips, someone to talk to
I feel comfort, made my day shorter
No longer feel my heartbeat.

(Young person speaking at a launch of the Court Assistance Scheme, in 1996)

Aaron Tang is a Solicitor with Legal Aid Parramatta and Co-ordinator of the Children's Legal Service. He comments:

" *Talking to a lawyer is daunting at the best of times. Whilst we're a specialised children's legal service, it tends to be difficult to do that, particularly if we see the client for 10 minutes. With this scheme, young people have someone they can go to, to find out: 'Who is my lawyer? When will I be in Court? What time do I need to come back from lunch?' Giving answers to all those things are helpful to them not getting so agitated. For lots of kids, Court Support stops them from essentially saying: 'I'm going home.' So they stay and avoid having a warrant for their arrest.* "

When young people face Court they are often also trying to deal with many problems in their lives such as homelessness, issues at school or substance misuse. Whilst many of these young people are already connected to youth workers and other forms of support, some are not. For those who are not already connected with services, contact with a Court support worker provides a second positive outcome: an opportunity to **improve young people's access to youth and welfare services.** Some access to welfare assistance can be provided on the spot, while other appointments are arranged as the young people wait, or connections are made to services of which many young people and their families are unaware. Whilst young people within the Juvenile Justice system receive welfare support to promote rehabilitation and reduce recidivism, there is little equivalent support provided to young people who aren't on supervised bonds. PCCAS fills this gap. Aaron describes this outcome:

" *It allows a multi-disciplined, holistic approach to working with children in conflict with the law. It fills*

a few gaps – a great majority of children will never have any involvement with JJ because they're not on supervised bonds, but on bail, so they miss out on any services but for Court support being involved. "

PCCAS support workers empower young people by helping them to understand their legal position, the case against them, the consequences and their options. Therefore, there are many ways in which the scheme *improves legal outcomes by having an advocate through the legal system*. Effective youth work can then facilitate a more just legal outcome. In addition, magistrates look more favourably on a young person who is connected to community, education or employment. Young people are more likely to avoid incarceration if there is evidence that they are on the path to addressing the causes of their offence. While young people wait for their cases to be heard, PCCAS workers can work with them, make phone calls to arrange enrolment in a course or in rehabilitation, or simply make an appointment with a course advisor or counsellor. Whether a conviction is recorded has a substantial impact on a young person's employment prospects. Where a Court support worker has been able to get to know a young person and their ambitions, these can be passed onto lawyers to be used in their arguments against the recording of a conviction.

A high proportion of cases appearing before the Parramatta Children's Court are Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs), frequently brought by families against their teenage children. The PCCAS has an impressive track record of successfully negotiating mediation, which can allow the AVO to be dropped. Since the breaching of an AVO results in a permanent record, there is a substantial reduction in unnecessary criminal records for these young people because of the de-escalation of family conflict by skilled youth workers within the PCCAS. Aaron reports:

" *They are very helpful with AVO matters. It's so superior to be able to say to a magistrate that the appointment is set up, rather than sending them to a community justice centre where they go in blank. Instead, that ball is already rolling. Without Court Support's help, a lot of matters we do wouldn't get all the way to mediation. Instead clients come back, parents come back, get more agitated and waste money going to a hearing that isn't necessary.* "

The Partnership

The Parramatta Children's Court Assistance Scheme is, at its heart, a welfare-legal sector partnership between the Macquarie Legal Centre (a Community Legal Centre and the auspicing agent), Legal Aid Parramatta, the Parramatta Children's Court and a variety of Western Sydney welfare providers who provide their workers as volunteers. Stan describes this partnership:

> "The model of Legal Aid in Parramatta differs from a number of other Children's Court schemes, mainly because we have a Children's Legal Service; most solicitors are specifically Children's Court – they're actually interested in all of a young person's needs.
>
> Anglicare's street outreach scheme has supported the Children's Court Scheme here since its beginning in 1995. We've had volunteers on the roster who have been staff here; we've paid their wages. The model runs on welfare organisations that are able to volunteer their workers' time at no cost to the scheme. We have partnered that way since the beginning of the scheme. The understandings aren't written or formalised, but it wouldn't be difficult to identify or articulate them because we are provided for by the Parramatta Children's Court – an office and phone paid for by Court etc. "

The Parramatta Children's Court Assistance Scheme is funded by the State Government through the Legal Aid Commission, and is part of a state-wide program of Children's Court Support Services.

What Works in this Partnership?

The Children's Court Assistance Scheme partnership has existed successfully for over a decade. What enables it to continue to deliver positive outcomes? The members identify four specific learnings about the partnership from their collaboration.

First, each partner is able to make a full contribution if there is **respect for each partner's contribution.**

A crucial aspect of this partnership is its inter-sectoral nature: a legal-welfare partnership between youth workers (both professional and volunteers) and Legal Aid lawyers and Court staff. Stan says:

> "If we're looking at a partnership between welfare and legal [sectors], the welfare system really needs to show it has benefits to offer. It will then gain credibility with the legal system. We've been able to demonstrate that the legal system works better with input from the welfare system. Both systems need to acknowledge their own shortcomings, and to see the possible benefits of the partnership.
>
> Legal Aid solicitors are the primary advocate for young people in the Courts. When they identify an issue they come to us. We have mutual respect for each other. "

Another important partnership is between the numerous youth agencies that volunteer their workers' time to participate in the scheme and in the networks that have developed. Again, Stan identifies elements of respect here:

> "We get youth workers who've had street worker, residential, drop-in and neighbourhood centre experience, and welfare organisations from a range of backgrounds; all come with a different perspective. There needs to be recognition that youth service providers all work differently and with different client groups, and that all those skills can work together and support each other.
>
> The beauty of it is that where a service might be particularly Anglo, we'll work hand-in-hand with services working mostly with multicultural communities: Islander, Middle Eastern, Indo-Chinese, Arabic speaking. We've been able to partner with so many different workers with skills and abilities and this brings great richness. "

The second learning evident from this program is that partners will maintain their commitment if there are clear **benefits for all partners**. Lawyers, Court staff and youth workers have found that interacting and relying on each other is mutually beneficial. Tim, for example, points to complementary outcomes:

"*The goal of both the Macquarie Legal Centre and the youth services is to try to ensure that young people's needs are met. For youth services, that focuses more on their welfare needs. For us, it's more an emphasis on their legal needs and rights. If we can help get young people accessing services that help with their underlying issues, that's a positive outcome for both youth services and us. Likewise if we can get them to an understanding of why it's important not to breach bail conditions, that is a positive outcome for both spheres.*"

We can explicitly point to some of the **benefits for youth workers, their agencies and other volunteers.** Youth workers and their agencies gain clients out of their participation. They also gain insights into young people's issues as they support them through their day in Court, and from a relationship with lawyers from whom they can seek advice for other clients. For youth services, Tim identifies:

"*Many youth workers get referrals out of it; it's a way to get clients. They get a direct link with kids in need. Many youth workers have a problem with clients not accessing their services, but in a Court they walk in straight to you.* "

Aaron sees similar benefits from the perspective of the legal profession:

"*A lot of clients who go to these youth services also overlap with our clientele. We provide them with clients and vice versa. Obviously we deal with the matters at Court, but we're also available to answer queries as they crop up. It's not uncommon for Stan to ring me and ask about issues a client has and whether we can do anything to help. It's a relationship above and beyond the daily work at Court...*

It provides Court support workers with a means of understanding a fairly important aspect or symptom of the young people they work with. They can deal with drug and alcohol issues, education etc but Court is something which weighs heavily on a young person's mind. They can refer directly to us, which is not the same as ringing up any old lawyer. "

Additionally, youth workers – both professional and volunteer – receive valuable training prior to joining the Court roster. Tim describes this:

"*Our volunteers receive training before they start on the roster. We do a full day of training with them in dealing with kids at Court. We cover everything from explaining how kids end up at Court through to dealing with the Court. That training has been really well received over the years; there is a high demand. This is of benefit for them in their practice and on their resumé.*

At the training days, we have very experienced youth workers doing the 'engaging with young people' section, and very experienced legal workers doing the legal section, so the training provides the best from both. To deliver the training, we partner with Children's Legal Service and have an experienced solicitor like Aaron to run the legal section of the training. "

Stan points to the ways in which this training feeds back into the skills of youth services:

"*Volunteers in the scheme feed back knowledge of the sector to their organisations. Working in the scheme increases their competency. Many volunteers become more educated in issues around engaging with young people (especially cold contact: walking up to a kid for the first time, who doesn't know you from a bar of soap). These skills aren't automatic, but workers pick them up as we work alongside each other.* "

There are also **benefits for Legal Aid lawyers and other Court workers.** PCCAS workers make the work of solicitors and other Court staff easier and more effective. Aaron points to these benefits:

> *They help us by assisting in communicating and liaising with clients. I think we probably get a lot more benefits out of them than they get out of us. They assist us in managing the operation of the Court. We're usually run off our feet. The process of taking names down as they come in and organising who's going to be seeing them allows us a little bit more space to see clients rather than worrying about who came first or chasing up paperwork. We constantly get asked: 'When am I going to be seen? When am I getting on?' Court support helps us liaise with clients to answer these young people's questions. They organise professional health reports and other information that we may not otherwise have found out, for example a young person with a mental health problem. The Court support workers will let the Court know that a young person has an appointment they need to go to at 2 pm, so we can move them up the list.*

Thirdly, the legal and welfare sector representatives in this partnership describe the importance of a strong sense of **shared intent** in achieving justice, empowerment and holistic wellbeing for young people. Tim describes this as: *"Being committed to the same things – this helps the partnership work. Youth services are committed to the welfare of young people and we're committed to upholding the rights of young people."*

The Legal Aid Lawyers and PCCAS support workers share a broader social justice perspective. The partnership provides many opportunities for advocacy and helping young people and families to advocate against harassment from police. Aaron says:

> *If there is something we can do to look at the bigger picture and the system, then that can be a positive outcome. For example strip searches are being done on a regular basis down at Belmore, and we're constantly getting charges of 'Resist arrest' as a result. It's not a completely positive outcome to get 'not guilty' verdicts, or even when we've also got the young people back into school. It's necessary that we're also addressing what the police are doing. We look for opportunities with local youth services to advocate around these issues...*
>
> *Our role is, as the child's representative, to act on the child's instructions. We are not the parents' lawyer – not putting forward the 'best interest' point of view. Parents often have an idea of what the Court should find: 'I want my son living at home with me'. The child might say: 'I want to live with my uncle'. Our role is to represent the child's point of view, not to say: 'to be with their parents is in their best interests'.*

The fourth lesson we can learn from this partnership is that the role of youth workers in a Children's Court will become valued through sustained and effective youth work over years. The initiation of a similar scheme will need to **prove its worth over time.** Here, Court workers (particularly the Legal Aid solicitors) have come, through experience, to respect and rely upon the youth work conducted through the Children's Court Assistance Scheme. In turn, the youth workers on the roster have developed greater awareness of the pressures placed on Legal Aid solicitors, and thus take a supportive rather than combative and critical approach to them. Tim describes this growth in trust:

"*Once we have one good outcome (for example, where a youth worker is able to conduct a tricky mediation with a family and the AVO is no longer required), the lawyer will come back in a similar circumstance in the future.*"

Aaron points to the importance of communication and knowing partners well:

"*What works in this partnership is that we've got to know each other, as simple as that might sound. Sometimes youth workers might feel that lawyers aren't spending enough time with a particular client. They think: 'Oh that lawyer's not so great', because they haven't been able to understand what the lawyer has done with that client. It could be as simple as spending a few minutes finding out what has happened. On the flipside, other lawyers don't take the time to understand why the youth workers are there, apart from waving a sheet in your face when you're taking instructions from ten other clients. We both need to have time to communicate and get to know each other. Several years ago, I took a few days off to visit the main youth providers to see what their work was about, and to see how my work can fit in better with theirs. That has helped me to see a bigger picture for each young person beyond their Court case.*"

Organisations that retain staff, and successfully pass on organisational knowledge, accrue great benefits over time. New generations of Legal Aid solicitors working within the Children's Court often begin afresh, lacking recognition of the contribution of the youth workers. This partnership has been greatly strengthened by the long-term participation of several youth workers and of the Legal Aid Coordinator. These long time participants have developed processes to induct new workers, deliberately passing on connections, relationships and protocols of the partnership. Aaron acknowledges this process:

"*The partnership has had greater effect for those within Legal Aid who've been here longer. I would like us to come to a point where everyone from Legal Aid and the Court Assistance Scheme knows what everyone else does and offers; also having in the back of all our minds the possibility of working together on broader systemic issues. As an organisation, we all hold corporate knowledge: my relationship with Court Support is the organisation's.*"

Stan sums up:

"*What works about this partnership is that it actually achieves positive outcomes for young people and doesn't just talk about them. We connect with each other's service providers across a huge area of south-western Sydney where otherwise these workers would work in isolation. We have a much better potential to resource ourselves and the young people we work with, than if we didn't have this partnership.*

The difference with this partnership model is that all the agencies involved are seen as equal, looked upon as just as important as each other to resource the partnership. There's no lead agency: everyone is needed to make it work."

In Summary:

The Parramatta Children's Court Assistance Scheme (PCAAS) is a welfare-legal sector partnership that provides support to young people appearing on criminal charges at the Parramatta Children's Court. There are other similar schemes across New South Wales, auspiced by other Community Legal Centres.

The partners identify three specific learnings as being critical to their success:

» *Respecting each partner's contribution*;
» *Providing benefits for all partners*;
» *Having a shared commitment*; and
» *Proving your worth over time.*

Section B:
Partnering with the Community

Many Communities – Many Partnerships

Crossroads Reconnect Collaborative Project Work in Melbourne

THROUGH THE VOICES OF: **MIC EMSLIE** AND **CHRISTINA PORTELLI** WITH COMMENTS FROM: **NOEMI GARCIA** AND **MICHAEL MAWAL**

Generalist English-speaking youth services increasingly need to work with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) communities. They can struggle with knowing where to begin. There are important lessons here from the collaborative project work of *Crossroads Reconnect* with communities and services in their area in the Northern suburbs of Melbourne.

Crossroads carries out case-based work with young people and families in the municipalities of Moreland and Hume, within the federally funded *Reconnect* early intervention initiative around youth homelessness and family reconnection. *Reconnect* requires services to engage in action research and this approach has enabled *Crossroads Reconnect* to become involved in community development projects in partnership with other agencies.

The Partners

Crossroads Reconnect is a Salvation Army-auspiced *Reconnect* program, located in the Northern and Western suburbs of Melbourne.

Australian Lebanese Welfare (ALW) is "a non-religious, non-political Arabic welfare organisation committed to providing support services to newly arrived and the more established Arabic speaking communities and to empower them to participate fully and equally in the wider community. ALW provides settlement services, counselling, advocacy, support groups and is also involved in community education." [1]

The *Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMY)* is "a community-based organisation that advocates for the needs of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. In supporting young people, CMY combines policy development and direct service delivery within a community development framework." [2]

The *Victorian Cooperative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups (VICSEG)* is a state-wide information and resource centre, which provides advocacy for parents from non-English speaking backgrounds.

African Australian Welfare Council (AAWC) is "a community-based non-profit organisation that responds to the settlement needs of migrants and refugees from African countries. AAWC priority target groups are families, women and youth. The following services are provided: support in securing housing; immigration advice and support; access to education and training; support of young persons; employment assistance; access to health services; income support; and sporting and recreational activities." [3]

A variety of other community agencies, government departments and schools have also participated in project-based collaborations.

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1 Department of Justice (Victoria): **Multicultural Directory** (2007)

2 CMYI Website: www.cmyi.net.au/Home (accessed: 13/11/07)
3 Department of Justice (Victoria): **Multicultural Directory** (2007)

Project-Based Work

Over the past few years, *Crossroads Reconnect* has been involved in several collaborations with CLD services and communities. Some of these have been:

» Supporting the production of a kit on the Leadership in Parenting Young Adolescents Program for Arabic Speaking Parents with Australian Lebanese Welfare (ALW);

» An African Youth Project with the Victorian Co-operative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups (VICSEG), the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMY) and the African Australian Welfare Council;

» Opening the School Gate: Engaging CLD Families in Schools project with CMYI and other agencies in the Northern region of Melbourne;

» The 'STEPS' project: Steps for Schools in establishing a Parent Network for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Communities with Moreland Community Health Centre, Anglicare Family Services Broadmeadows, Fawkner Secondary College and ALW;

» The Turkish and Arabic Speaking Community Young Women's Group with young people, their parents, community agencies, school based programs, local government and CLD specific services during 2001;

» Assisting with providing school holiday activities with ALW for young people from Arabic communities;

» Involvement with a refugee week soccer tournament and barbeque with CMY, ALW and Broadmeadows Secondary College;

» Organising one day training on Working with Young People in Turkish and Arabic Speaking Communities Experiencing Family Violence with the Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre (DVIRC) and the Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Outreach Service (IWDVOS).

These initiatives respond to the specific needs of the area. Mic Emslie is a former *Crossroads Reconnect* worker. He describes some of the characteristics of the area:

" *Geographically this is a really big area, ranging from medium density inner-city (Brunswick) through to semi-rural (Craigieburn and Sunbury).*

There are some marked differences across the area. For example Sunbury and Craigieburn are quite Anglo, on the urban fringe and have significant new housing estates. Moreland is becoming increasingly gentrified while remaining ethnically diverse. Crossroads Reconnect also covers Broadmeadows with intergenerational poverty and higher levels of unemployment compared to other areas. Considerable numbers of people newly arrived to Australia settle in Hume and Moreland. "

The broader goal of *Reconnect* is to provide appropriate services to CLD young people and their families in the project area. Mic explains:

" *The aim of Reconnect is to reduce youth homelessness by improving young people's connections with family, community and/or school. For example, Crossroads Reconnect workers might get involved in situations where young people and their families have tried to sort out problems, but need an independent third party to assist in that process. There are a number of roles a Reconnect worker might have in their case work such as mediation, advocacy to help young people get back into school, help with Centrelink, and counselling. We also have some brokerage funding to assist us with the work. One of the good practice principles of the Reconnect program is to provide culturally and contextually responsive and relevant work. So in delivering the service as required by the funding body, we need to pay attention to this.* "

The collaborations aimed to make use of cultural and community experts to provide appropriate services that met the *Reconnect* objectives. One specific issue is that some CLD communities were reticent to access their service until a crisis point. Christina Portelli is a *Crossroads Reconnect* worker. She reports that: *"The issue of homelessness and of young people leaving home can be taboo for many communities and very shameful. It can be extremely difficult for some families to be speaking about that issue with a worker."*

Therefore, as an early intervention service provider, the *Crossroads Reconnect* workers identified that collaborations with community agencies could facilitate early intervention within a cultural group. Mic notes:

> *Some families might hold particular ideas about welfare professionals: that they're all positioned as part of child protection and they'll have their child removed. There is also the shame thing too: they might not call in a service until there is a crisis; whereas Reconnect is an early intervention approach. Trust is a really big issue for newly arrived communities.*

History

Crossroads Reconnect workers were aware that their service was not adequately meeting the needs of CLD young people in their area. Mic says:

> *We weren't necessarily seeing groups of young people from all CLD communities within our direct practice case-work. The area is culturally diverse, so we should be providing services to everyone, not just seeing it as the responsibility of CLD specific services to do that. We recognised that CLD young people face particular disadvantage and barriers, which they have a right to have attended to. It was about how we could make the resources of the program available to these communities.*

The *Reconnect* workers could see a variety of reasons why they, as Anglo youth workers, might not be best placed to conduct project work with CLD young people in their area on their own. Christina explains:

> *We recognised we might not be the most appropriate people to be providing direct practice to CLD young people and their families. Through partnerships and supporting other services, and being involved in project work as opposed to direct practice – this would be a better way to provide that support.*

The workers were also conscious that there were many gaps in service provision to these young people, and culturally specific workers articulated these at network meetings. Mic reports:

> *Most of the collaborations came about because we'd go to network meetings and hear about gaps. Or we would hear a worker from another service talking about a particular need in the area and not being able to address it. As a team, the two of us would discuss how could we support this work. The project work would often be initiated like that.*

Strategies

There are two main strategies employed by *Crossroads Reconnect* in these collaborations. At its most basic, these collaborations have firstly involved *Crossroads Reconnect* in **contributing money and/or seeking funding for culturally specific agencies** to deliver the work. Mic and Christina describe this approach:

> *We'd know that some money was coming available and that we had two weeks to submit a proposal, so we'd write something up and run it past the funding body to see what happens. We'd chat to an agency, then pass it on to our manager and get them to chat to FACSIA, our funding body.*
>
> *If one of the agencies had a good idea that fitted in with the broad parameters of the funding – strengthening young people's connection to family, community and school, which could be a lot of things – we'd say: 'Let's give it a go.' We'd let FACSIA know we were doing it within an action research framework.*
>
> *It wasn't heaps of money: from $500 up to occasionally $20,000, but because the agencies we partnered with had so little money, $500 was a lot for them – they could do a lot with it.*

However, *Crossroads Reconnect* has not simply been a small scale funding body. They have also engaged in partnerships with others in organising these projects and in encouraging a culture of continual action research for practitioners. Thus the second strategy involved *Crossroads Reconnect* **contributing effort, organisation, enthusiasm and an action research approach to these projects.** Mic and Christina explain:

> *Money is the big thing we contribute to other partners. But we also attend committees, help to generate ideas, talk about what's happening and*

help with documenting the lessons that have been learnt. We also contribute support, enthusiasm and a general interest in the area. "

Funding has been largely contributed from surplus funds, brokerage funds and one-off grants, through *Crossroads Reconnect*. Mic adds: *"Sometimes both agencies provide some funding, in kind support and/or the labour of their workers."*

Outcomes for Young People

There have been two significant outcomes for young people: **increased opportunity for CLD young people to participate in effective community-specific projects**; and **improved working relationships between agencies, thus increasing CLD young people's access to services.**

In a funding environment where small culturally-specific agencies struggle to gain access to adequate funding, a larger project like *Reconnect* can contribute funding to smaller agencies to give CLD young people **increased opportunities to participate in effective community-specific projects**. Christina and Mic provide some examples:

" *A lot of it has been about giving opportunities that wouldn't have been the case. In the African Youth Project, there were camps where they got to go away for a weekend. Ordinarily they wouldn't have had the money to afford to do that. It brought young people together. The Turkish and Arabic Speaking Young Women's Group was for young women who were isolated, and didn't have much opportunity to develop relationships with peers, or to participate in recreation; they had access to this with family support.* "

Though it is more difficult to measure, it is apparent that these collaborations have provided opportunities for the development of **working relationships between agencies, and this has increased CLD young people's access to services**. This is true for *Reconnect* itself, which previously was not providing services for CLD young people proportionate to their local numbers. Christina notes that: *"It's put our faces out in the community to community groups that weren't aware of our program, and*

how we might support them. I've had a general increase in CLD referrals." Mic adds: *"Approximately one third of our clients are now from CLD backgrounds."*

This is supported by comments from Michael Mawal, Youth Services Coordinator for Australian Lebanese Welfare Inc.:

" *The outcomes for young people from these collaborations, apart from extra programs funded, is the knowledge of the service. By working with the parents and the kids, you're doing the preventative work so that hopefully the issue of homelessness doesn't arise.* "

The *Reconnect* workers are now well networked to better meet the needs of the CLD clients. Christina says: *"If we're struggling with a young person from a particular background we use secondary consultations; we would call up ALW or CMYI and ask for advice."*

What Works in These Collaborations?

There are four clear learnings that emerge from these collaborations, about flexible funding and supportive leadership, using a collaborative approach with cultural sensitivity, building on locally derived strategies, and building in an action research cycle.

In the first place, *Crossroads Reconnect* has been able to initiate these collaborations because of their **flexible funding and supportive leadership**. The *Reconnect* program is unusual in a number of ways: it is better resourced than other programs, it is flexibly funded, and surplus funds have been made available for good practice projects that fall within the *Reconnect* parameters. Mic explains:

" *These collaborations were possible because money and funding were available. For Crossroads Reconnect, this has meant providing access to the resources of the program (Reconnect one-off grants, surplus funds and brokerage) to communities that are not well represented in our direct practice work. Reconnect is funded for two project workers and a*

part time manager. We've had long periods without a manager and that money has gone into our surplus. Rather than ask for that back, the funding body told us that, if we wanted to use it, we should put in a proposal.

Funding and reporting models need to give workers room to be creative, innovative, flexible and open to doing new approaches. Being creative means not always knowing where the work might go, but being open to new possibilities while having a clear intention and purpose – new possibilities, funding without necessarily knowing the outcome, so there can be a focus on process, not outcome."

Such exploratory funding – itself part of an action research approach – means one can be flexible in working within good practice principles. So when *Crossroads Reconnect* developed project plans with local agencies (that were based in good practice, and around which they wanted to undertake action research), the *Reconnect* leadership and their own supervisors at the Crossroads Salvation Army were able to act on their own discretion and approve that funding. Mic adds:

"*What works is supportive program frameworks from funding bodies. In this instance FACSIA fund Reconnect programs to deliver services within a framework of Good Practices Principles, and these include providing culturally and contextually appropriate service delivery. FACSIA also requires Reconnect services to engage in relevant action research projects to continually improve services. Reconnect services are required to report to FACSIA on how they are working within these frameworks. These formal requirements to attend to practice working with CLD communities are complemented by informal interest and support from FACSIA staff overseeing Reconnect, to do work in this area.*"

Such flexible, responsive collaborations require management that is either actively supportive or, at least, doesn't interfere. Mic says:

"*Supportive team leaders and program managers of generalist services, who share an interest, encourage, support and enable the direct practice workers to work within these frameworks – they enable the work*

to occur. Further to this, we need team leaders and program managers who know the networks, issues, demographics and usefulness of collaborative work."

The second substantial learning from these collaborations is that 'mainstream' agencies need to enter partnership with culturally specific agencies by listening, by adopting a **collaborative approach and with cultural sensitivity**. Mic explains:

"*It helps with partnering if you are responsive, open to hear from others, culturally aware in working cross culturally – being attuned to that. It's important that you're not coming in as an expert, that you are open to hearing other people; but also coming in with ideas and opinions and your own expertise. A good place to start is getting brochures translated, and attending network meetings and being open to finding where you can help out, forming relationships with culturally specific workers and others at network meetings.*"

One form of awareness requires that you not see yourself as an expert about issues pertaining to a particular ethnic community. Recognition of the limitations of your own cultural and educational framework, means that you will expect and accept that those from different backgrounds will be able to challenge and add to your knowledge. *"You need to move away from being Eurocentric – bringing 'culture' from the West,"* says Mic. *"Instead, exchange and respect each other's knowledge – a cultural exchange. Don't assume you know about others' cultures and don't see a lack of knowledge of others' cultures as a limitation; this is an opportunity to ask questions to understand and learn."* Noemi Garcia, Program Team Leader (North West) and Multicultural Youth and Family Worker for the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) endorses this:

"*The partnership work we did with Crossroads worked really well because of their flexibility and trust in our work. They never questioned what we were doing or proposing because of our experience with CLD young people and communities. They were always interested in documenting the learnings, which was great. We would meet regularly to discuss where things were at: what worked, what didn't and we always used everything we did as a learning tool.*"

Michael Mawal of Australian Lebanese Welfare Inc. also comments:

> "One of the main things that they did right, which doesn't happen often, is that they go in there without any preconceived thoughts about how people should be or base their ideas of what people should be on stereotypes and other cultural norms. They are always very willing to listen to different ideas on how to approach the different cultures."

Mic says that this is central to their work:

> "It's not enough to say that each program is 'accessible to everyone; anyone can come'. If an agency is not realising that, at the last project they ran, some CLD young people experienced harassment, and then went away and told their friends, then the young people will not access the programs again. Some agencies approach it in a way that is not engaging in a dialogue or does not involve listening to the expertise of culturally specific workers in the area. That gets everyone's head shaking. Sadly, it is often the largest provider, with the most resources, who does this kind of practice."

The third learning is that agencies need to develop relationships and networks that are local, look for marginalised communities within their local area, and form collaborations that are **locally derived**. Mic stresses the importance of this:

> "Initiatives are generated from local communities, rather than directives from external sources. It starts where the community need is. We don't say: 'This will happen', but it comes from workers having dialogue together, so relationships and networking are important. It's important to be attentive to local community needs and to support and build upon initiatives that others have identified as required to meet these needs, rather than developing new initiatives and programs as a silo service. It's important that services working together are locally based, so there is a shared knowledge of the area. It helps to have the organisations based in the local area, and have connections with the local CLD communities."

Noemi Garcia adds: "Highlighting the importance of networks is really important in achieving positive outcomes." Mic also says:

> "Build on previous work. This can include bringing in new partners and others willing to become involved for fresh perspectives and new ideas. Aim for sustainability in relation to community partnerships and project outcomes."

Michael agrees: "It's better to fit into what's already there and existing, to find out what is there and how you can fit into it, and if there is a weakness or a lack of something, then look at organising your own network."

A long-term commitment to the local community and to working at this local level to develop networks and relationships will reap greater rewards. Mic points to the value of on-going support from committed workers:

> "In this area, Michael and Noemi have been here forever with a very long-term dedication to working with CLD young people and have set up a really effective and functioning network: the Hume-Moreland Youth Cultural Connection Network. It works well here because workers have been in the area for ages. You've got to recognise that building relationships and partnerships can take time, so you need to see this work as long term."

The fourth learning from these collaborations is that, by using **an action research cycle**, an agency and its workers can substantially learn from each collaboration, can strategise and experiment with putting lessons into action, and can document and share this action-based research, to improve the practice of other agencies. Mic points out:

> "It's important to ask for evaluation from young people, families and service providers, to enable effective learning from experience and lessons to inform future work. We've found it really useful to evaluate and document the collaborative work we are involved in, as a means for recording significant learning and assisting with setting future directions. Keep asking questions, being curious during planning and delivery."

Action research provides the immediate reward of more reflective and consequently more effective practice. When compared to traditional workplace sharing of practice, it challenges participants and allows them to share insights rather then summaries of practice. This extends to everyday meeting, says Mic:

" *We make use of action research, sometimes in meetings. Part of FACSIA's model of action research is to be, from day one, thinking about other stakeholders: how you consult and involve them.* "

In Summary:

Crossroads Reconnect works with young people and families in the municipalities of Moreland and Hume in the Northern suburbs of Melbourne. Case-based work is the main role of the workers in *Reconnect*, the federally funded early intervention initiative around youth homelessness and family reconnection. The program and funding model also requires *Reconnect* services to engage in action research, and this enables *Crossroads Reconnect* to become involved in a range of community development projects in partnership with others.

Generalist English-speaking youth services are increasingly required to work with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) communities. They can struggle with knowing where to begin.

This story reports on lessons generated from many examples of practice from *Crossroads Reconnect* doing collaborative project work with these communities and services. These are about the need for:

» **Flexible funding and supportive leadership**;
» A **collaborative approach and cultural sensitivity**;
» **Locally derived projects and networks**; and
» An **action research cycle**.

Integrating Youth Transitions

The Connect Central Consortium

THROUGH THE VOICES OF: **JOHN BONNICE**, **JOHN GEARY**, **DR LOUISE HARVEY** AND **JANET RUSSELL**
WITH COMMENTS FROM: **JULIE CONNELL**, **GARY GRIFFIN**, **DALE PEARCE** AND **SOPHIE ROSE**

The *Connect Central Consortium* is a partnership between eight education institutions and welfare organisations in the Bendigo-Goldfields region of Central Victoria. It aims to integrate the youth transition process in the region and, since its formation in 2006, has brought both practitioners and senior management together for regular **sharing of practice**, **frank conversations** and **community decision making** about the overlaps and gaps in local service delivery to marginalised young people.

A formal memorandum of understanding guides the partnership between St. Lukes Anglicare, Bendigo Senior Secondary College (NETschool), Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE, Continuing Education Bendigo, Bendigo Community Health Services, Castlemaine Secondary College, Catholic College Bendigo, and Maryborough Education Centre. The Goldfields Local Learning and Employment Network (GLLEN) also plays a key role in the facilitation and support for the consortium.

The Initiative

In working to integrate the youth transition process, *Connect Central* co-ordinates the local Youth Transition Support Initiative (YTSI), a Victorian Department of Education program, and works alongside the local Job Placement, Employment and Training (JPET) program, a federally funded (Family and Community Services) initiative. Both YTSI and JPET case-manage and broker services for young people who are not in education, training and employment.

Since its inception in 2006, *Connect Central* has gathered data on young people in these regional transition programs. There are between 700 and 900 school aged young people in their area who are out of education, training or employment. 61% of YTSI and JPET clients have a highest level of education between Year 7 and 9, and 25% of these young people began but did not complete Year 10. 59% of clients have not been in any school setting

for at least one year, and 25% for at least two years. The proportion of male to female clients is approximately 50:50.

Goals

Connect Central was explicitly established to address the lack of co-ordination between education, training and welfare providers for disadvantaged young people in the Bendigo-Goldfields region. The Consortium's Briefing Paper in 2007 notes a *"desire to create a single re-entry point to education, employment and training for young people aged 15-19 years"* within the region, and a belief that *"on their own, each service provider does not have the capacity to effectively meet the complex needs of this 'at risk' cohort of young people within our communities."* It asserts that:

> With an integrated, coordinated and whole of community response, these young people in need can be supported to identify and sustain appropriate pathways within education, employment and training. [1]

Dr Louise Harvey, CEO of Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE (BRIT) defines the fundamental premises of the model as:

» A genuine focus on the customer – which requires us to transcend or, at the very least, rethink our concerns about territory and our preoccupation with the boundaries we establish around ourselves and the services we deliver;

» Recognition and respect for the unique and critical contribution of every service provider involved in supporting youth at risk; and

» Recognition that the issues confronting young people at risk … are a community problem which requires a collective community response. [2]

She goes on to say that:

> " *Provision of services to young people in Bendigo is as fragmented as you find it anywhere; this is a beginning of seeing how we could connect them better. Principles of integration are the best thing we have to maximise the resources available.* "

Funding

The 2006 State Government budget provided for additional youth transition support workers in twelve regions of socio-economic disadvantage across Victoria. One of these regions was the Goldfields LLEN area, which includes Bendigo. Under this initiative, two case management staff could be employed from the beginning of 2007 through to September 2010. The *Connect Central* Consortium successfully tendered for the Youth Transition Support Initiative (YTSI), with St Luke's as the auspicing agent.

For the moment, there is no financial contribution expected of partners. However, developing a sustainable funding model was one of the three strategic directions for *Connect Central* in 2007-2008.

Forming the Consortium

The Consortium began in discussions early in 2005 between Louise Harvey and the CEO of Continuing Education Bendigo. Coming from other sectors to the education sector, both commented on the fragmented nature of the education sector locally and the lack of opportunities for linking groups. Louise describes how the discussion process expanded:

> " *We began by looking to integrate our two organisations, putting a number of staff around a table and starting to talk about it. It started to grow, because we invited a number of other organisations and their staff… The aim was to get a solution that was customer focused. We didn't invite CEOs, but the practitioners looking for solutions on how we could do things better.*

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1 Connect Central Consortium Briefing Paper, 2007
2 Speaking at a forum presenting the Integrated Assessment Model to the Education, Employment, Training and Welfare Sectors, August 2, 2006

I believe that if you put people who are passionate about providing a better service to their clients (in this case young people at risk) around a table and are patient, they will come up with better solutions. They did: a focus on assessment and referral – a one-stop-shop, a whole-of-community response to assist the young people who are falling through the cracks. With a single entry point for young people [who are] disengaged from education, training and employment, we could assess their needs better; they wouldn't need to tell their story over and over, and we could get a better match. We also believed that, if young people were better placed, we could maximise the use of services available, and minimise risks to young people, because the transition workers could hold onto the young person until they were established in a good fit.

When we finally got the model documented, we took it to a 'Community of Service Providers Forum' in August 2006 to get support for the concept, to establish a group to investigate how we would set it up, and to get funding. The Youth Transition Support Initiative (YTSI) money came along and we were able to bid for that money as a consortium. **"**

While a couple of us had the original idea and drove the beginning, leadership has now shifted completely to the consortium. The Committee of Management is the decision-making body now. **"**

The partners recognised the risks involved when competing organisations try to work together. Hence the auspicing role was therefore given to the partner, St Luke's, with the **least** vested interest in where the young people went. Similarly, the Goldfields Local Learning and Employment Network (GLLEN) played an important facilitation role because of its 'neutrality'.

Louise notes that, if any one education provider had owned the YTSI, competition amongst all the providers would have endangered the whole initiative's focus. *"It was very important that St Luke's, which had the least vested interest in where young people go, had the auspicing role. They could best maintain the focus on customer service and outcomes."*

John Geary, Executive Officer of the Goldfields Local Learning and Employment Network (GLLEN) likens his organisation's facilitation role to that of 'Switzerland' *"because we don't have vested interests. We can suggest things and people take it on board because they know we're relatively independent. An independent change agent will always be more effective."*

As the partnership gathered momentum, the agencies recognised the strategic importance of their participation. *"I'd say the overarching goals of a single entry point and of flexibility in programs are shared,"* says John. But he also recognises that commitment still varies significantly. *"For example BRIT will be strongly behind this from a strategic and whole of community point of view"* and, for other groups, it would now be un-strategic for them to be absent. *"Others are at the table because there's a realisation that they need to be at the table."*

Strategies
The *Connect Central* Consortium is currently using four key strategies. The dominant strategy is simply that of **getting people who are passionate about young people around a table.**

Sophie Rose, a Youth Worker with Continuing Education Bendigo (CEB) says that:

"*Bringing everyone together develops a greater understanding of where everyone else comes from, and allows us to understand what they are looking for when working with a young person. There are medical models, social welfare models, educational and vocational models; we are able to compare practices and see what each is missing out on, and develop an understanding of what we need from each other – what we expect from each other and from kids.* **"**

Another vital strategy of the *Connect Central* Consortium is to **bring the expertise of the welfare sector into the education sector**, where many disadvantaged young people struggle.

John Bonnice is General Manager of Children, Youth and Family Services at St Luke's, Anglicare in Bendigo. They are the auspice agency for the YTSI and a member

of the Consortium. He points firstly to the impact of disconnected services on young people's lives:

> *When the schools, child protection and youth/family work are disconnected, you have replicated the disconnection that young people have experienced in their lives. Unless these systems are holding and supporting young people, you'll never start to really make change. If schools are isolated, then you isolate a pretty important part of the kid's life, so youth services have to engage with and work with schools.*
>
> *Joining up of service providers across sectors sends marginalised young people a powerful message about support. We need to work out what enables [young people] to feel positive about the future. Solution-focused, strengths-based models work with disadvantaged young people, but some schools lack a practice model of what enables change. Working in partnership with schools allows us, as youth workers, to share effective practice models, and influence their practice.*

The strategy of *Connect Central* that is experienced most directly by young people is the **intensive pathway management by well-informed, well-connected, and impartial transition workers**. The status of the *Connect Central* transition workers within the community is substantially improved by the commitment of key decision-makers to ensure that the process works.

Louise Harvey notes that the Consortium *"gives some weight and credibility to the transition workers, and that doors open more readily when they are looking for an appropriate placement or service for their clients."*

Dale Pearce, Principal of Bendigo Senior Secondary College (BSSC) says: *"We're getting better at having kids understand that here's a point at which they can reconnect: a single point of reconnection."* He goes on to say that community recognition has also increased: *"not just of the number of young people, but what their issues are; of the point of disconnection and what the best and most appropriate way is to reconnect those young people. Building a knowledge base of what the issues are will help us, in time, to get much better at what we do."*

Finally, there is recognition of **the strength of quantitative data** to convince the education sector of the need for change in their approach with marginalised young people.

John Bonnice notes that *"Youth workers within this kind of partnership will have a louder voice if they encourage the group to keep looking at the story coming through from the young people affected by the program."* This means being based in the evidence of young people's experiences and voices:

> *Let's listen to the feedback from the young people because they will tell us what we need to know about how we're going. Bring data to meetings, and explore what it is telling us: what is the feedback from young people? Using an evidence base and drawing people back to it allows the work of the partnership to be directed by the lived experiences of our clients, rather than the conjecture and opinion of 'experts'.*

Outcomes for young people

The transition workers themselves, and all parties participating in cross-sector dialogue, are developing a deeper understanding of the many issues facing disadvantaged young people. In particular, the youth sector brings a social justice analysis of the causes of disadvantage, which reduces blaming of young people. The result is **better support** for disadvantaged young people to enable them to access education, training and welfare services.

Janet Russell, CEO of Continuing Education Bendigo (CEB) draws attention to the fact that *"many of these kids face intergenerational unemployment, compounded by many other issues; no sense of what educational success might be, and little expectations."* She then points out that *"the advocacy role of Connect Central can counter prejudices against disadvantaged young people. Support workers enable young people to see what's out there and to lift their own expectations."* However, she says *"there is a long way to go within the community, particularly within the business community. Many employers fear young people at risk. Connect Central allows youth work which promotes understanding and acknowledgement of the barriers which disadvantaged young people face."*

The *Connect Central* partnership has enabled some education and training providers to **match the courses** they schedule to the needs and interests of young people. This is seen as an important potential of the partnership.

Janet Russell admits that *"we had courses that were supposed to be what the market wanted, but we weren't able to get enrolments."* They then got feedback from *Connect Central* that they had young people they couldn't place – because they couldn't find courses they wanted to do. *"Obviously we hadn't [previously] asked young people."* As a response, says Janet one outcome of the Consortium process has been action on this advice: *"We were able to be very flexible and open up retail training."*

Provision of education options goes beyond that of creating new courses. The right of schools to exclude young people is being (diplomatically) challenged through the *Connect Central* partnership. The reasons why young people have been excluded are examined and, where it appears that school remains the best pathway, the transition workers seek conciliation with schools, backed up by influential people from within the community.

Julie Connell is Co-ordinator of the NETschool, a Bendigo Senior Secondary College Alternative Campus. She describes a process where *"at a Connect Central meeting, I will talk about referrals I've had from a school with the Principal or a representative from that school. Some kids are encouraged to go back to school, with support, after being told by several partners that they can go back."*

What Works in the Connect Central Consortium?

As participants tried to articulate why this partnership is working, they commonly referred to 'shared intent', 'trust' and 'because it is locally derived'.

However, the difficulties involved with **generating trust and mutual respect** were not downplayed; the risks of losing this were recognised. Julie Connell notes: *"You have to be at least open to, and have a shared agreement of, how we'll work. If one partner decides to go off and handle or find their own kids in their own way, the whole system can*

break down."

So far, transparency in the referral process has promoted this trust. Janet Russell says that their ambitions for *Connect Central* will require greater trust, especially as they aspire to develop a joined-up service delivery model. *"We haven't had to test that yet,"* she says. *"The trust is there because each player is playing a quite distinct role right now in terms of service provision. However, in the consortium, there are potentially competitors. At this stage it's been very transparent: we have reports that come back to us that show every referral, options given, where they've come from and where they've ended up."*

These issues about competition and trust between organisations were the Consortium's first concerns. Louise Harvey draws attention to the inherent nature of competition in the education system:

> **"** *The way education, particularly the post-compulsory part, is set up within Victoria, it's very competitive – partially privatised, even the secondary system. It breeds a level of competitiveness in rural and regional markets that is at odds with the local community interest. It's very difficult to engender a climate of trust, clearly focused on client and community outcomes, when everyone is cutting each other's throats for contracts, unless the community is very strong-minded, and takes a strong interest in who's providing what in the community.* **"**

Janet Russell from Continuing Education Bendigo (CEB) points to examples of the development of a more cooperative environment through coordination of services – but also points to the fragile nature of this:

> **"** *We already help young people find other courses when they leave CEB. There was already some referral happening, but now there is much more. This is partly philosophical within the organisation: we wouldn't ever say: 'We don't know anywhere else you could go', or try to hold onto them if they would be better elsewhere.*
>
> *Co-ordinated service provision is a huge trust thing and we're not yet at the point of sitting down with competitors and agreeing not to duplicate courses*

and services. But all organisations are hard pressed economically; to step outside that and expose themselves is too risky for many organisations. CEB and BRIT will probably try something to show that it can be done. But straight away, a private RTO can jump into the marketplace and offer the same program, so there is fear around threats from non-consortium members. It must be harder for larger organisations to compromise in these ways; also they will culturally find it hard to move quickly.

Secondly, there are challenges associated with the welfare sector and education sector working together, and respecting and trusting one another. Youth workers characteristically argue that teachers and school administrators don't value their skills and don't treat them as equals. This inequality seems to persist, but is under challenge within the partnership:

John Bonnice, from St Luke's in the youth/community sector, has experienced tensions with some schools:

" *In the past, there has been a clash of cultures between youth agencies and schools. There are some heavy discussions around trying to get on a more collaborative basis. In recent times, there has been a building of real partnerships between youth agencies and schools. Schools and youth services* **are** *finding common ground to work together, whilst there still might be differences of opinion and practice. We've had to build some credibility and trust within the education sector. Education is critical, so you need, as a youth service, to engage with them and vice versa.* "

Sophie Rose also sees this as a youth worker with CEB:

" *We are still butting heads against what other people are expecting, and people's perception of welfare, and [against] misconceptions of youth and social workers; having to continually justify what our role is and why it is effective. Youth and social workers have to know that they are equals in relationships with schools etc; we need to explain what we're there for, and Connect Central will be a good vehicle for doing that.* "

Within the Consortium there is recognition of, and respect for, the expertise of individuals and organisations.

Janet Russell notes that: *"people from education are listening to the welfare point of view."*

Many of the participants argue that the partnership works because it's **locally derived and locally accountable** and because it has a **shared local intent**: a strong, mutual willingness and commitment to finding better solutions.

John Bonnice says that *"the partnership hasn't happened because anyone told us to."* Rather, he says, *"this whole initiative came from people on the ground – which makes it much better. It's easier because we want to do it, have a commitment to it, and have created it ourselves. It has come out of our aspiration and vision. We want to be there, which means we're willing to give and take a bit more."*

John Geary points to local precedents of community accountability in the Bendigo Bank, Bendigo Telco and the 1970s Country Education Project (CEP). *"We're talking about community solutioning,"* he says. *"St Luke's commitment to social justice helps too. Heads of other organisations also feel a strong sense of social justice and equity, as well as the costs to the community of not providing Connect Central."* He goes on to point to a locally accountable economic justification for the partnership:

" *In the three transition programs that have come together for a single entry point, each has money provided by the federal or state government. They might believe their accountability is to the federal or state government (which may be true in a sense), but that's money that has been generated from taxes in this area, and that needs to be used in an appropriate manner to target disengaged young people. This should be planned and accountable back to local stakeholders. The criticism is that, in the past, there hasn't been anyone local to closely monitor the outcomes of programs. Reporting has happened previously to Melbourne or Canberra. We would say that organisations or stakeholders should respond more quickly to dissatisfaction through local feedback about what's not working.* "

Each institution or organisation expressed satisfaction that the partnership is, or will, help them to achieve better outcomes with young people. The partnership is thus delivering **improved efficacy for partners**: a sense

that they are performing their core business with young people in a manner that is more effective because of the partnership. This includes a more appropriate matching of what partners offer to what young people want or need. The acknowledgement of the strengths of each organisation, and a commitment that young people will not be set up to fail, means that welfare organisations are able to offer continued support once young people are placed within education, training or employment.

As a result of the work of the Consortium, Julie Connell now sees that *"young people arrive at an education or training provider with a clearly thought through plan of what they want to do. They arrive with a strong advocate who will continue to support them, in addressing all their barriers to participation."* She gives an example:

> *At a selection interview this morning, the young person came in with a Connect Central worker and a parent. I was told her story. We had an intense conversation about why she's not at school, what she did to end up where she is, and whether she is ready to move forward. She was here for the right reasons, knew what we offered, and had selected it because it met her needs.*

Louise Harvey says that this is the beginning of *"a more orderly transition and placement of young people in the most appropriate setting."* She reflects that, in the past, TAFE ended up with many of these young people, but that: *"they'd get into trouble because this was not the right place. They'd have to go through a lot of pain before we worked that out. Now, when they do come to us, it's terrific, because they're well suited and well placed."* And she significantly notes: *"No one wants to be part of a young person's failure."* However she points out that this has been a big learning curve for TAFE staff:

> *Previously they thought we worked quite well with marginalised young people, but many of them were on behaviour contracts. Through looking at our own and other practices with these young people, we were able to see that we weren't succeeding with many of them.*

John Geary adds that a critical element of 'what works' is *"adding value to the individual organisations. It also involves recognising that each organisation has a contribution to make and, without that contribution, what you're setting out to achieve can't be achieved: sending a message that what they contribute is valued and important."*

This improved efficacy has also had an impact on the work of a Bendigo alternative education setting, the NETschool. The work-load for its director of NETschool has been substantially reduced as a result of intensive, well connected transition case-management through *Connect Central*. Julie Connell describes this:

> *Often during a selection interview we'd find out the young persons were not suited to NETschool and encourage them to try out other avenues within the community. We'd make many phone calls. Now, when kids come to us with some connection with a Connect Central transition worker, they are able to articulate why they want to be here. They have some sense of what's gone wrong, and what decision they need to make. They are in a position to make a conscious decision. They are only here because we offer what they want – they know what type of facility it is. That saves so much time. I'm not fielding multiple calls asking for things we don't have.*

> *Connect Central also hooks them in if they need welfare support. Usually they have that already started, and have been referred to counselling support or families to Centrelink – we don't have to pick that up. They come here ready to learn. We haven't really needed the Connect Central workers to provide too much support once the kids are here, but we can make a call or send an email and request follow up.*

The ACE providers have had similar experiences:

For Sophie Rose, *"it has increased the percentage of enrolments here who are here to learn rather than to collect Centrelink. We now have 70-80% of our students referred from Connect Central"* and for Janet Russell, *"there is an expectation that, if a young person is being referred to you by Connect Central, it has been properly researched, not just that you're the only place that can take them. The provider has been chosen as the best fit for the young person. As this has been experienced, it has given Connect*

Central credibility."

A significant barrier to assisting young people in transition has been the lack of funding available for young people out of school, particularly those leaving after the school year has begun. This barrier is being addressed as a whole of community issue. Dale Pearce suggests a solution based on the Consortium's work:

> *The solution may well be to have funding attached to help them re-engage. At the moment the model attaches funding to the institution they're at for people who step outside the mainstream pathways, and it's quite challenging to provide them with the support they need. Each of our students who are engaged in Year 11 and 12 are subject to funding of around $5800 each year. So why shouldn't a student wanting to reconnect also be funded?*

The Consortium's experience of change-making reinforces the need to **be strategic about who is involved**. "You have to choose your leaders well," says Louise Harvey. *"Most importantly, make sure there are no control freaks involved. It's not about representation to begin with: be more strategic. If you've got the right kind of people with the wherewithal to come up with the models, then you've got a product to sell."* She notes that in the development of the Consortium, *"we didn't go out and talk about the concept until it was real. So much ends up as a talk-fest if it's a concept and not concrete. It's more helpful to narrowly define what you can concretely change, then present that, and see what people think. Instead of talking about the problem, come up with the solution. This initial group of people might be very different (it's those with on-the-ground expertise, a willing group of practitioners) to those who make the decision: those with political clout, authority and community standing."*

John Bonnice reinforces that *"Human attributes are the glue of all this, and you can't find them in a manual."* He points to: *"a willingness to change, wanting to listen to the community, young people and families; a willingness to be flexible – to think outside the square and bend the rules; people with vision, passion and optimism..."* However, he also recognises the importance of organisational commitment:

> *For a local youth worker, you need to have your organisation on board. They need to be committed to it. The collaboration has to happen on all levels. We've had people round the table who can make decisions and commit their organisation to it, on the spot.*
>
> *If organisations want to work in partnership, they need to ask themselves: What kind of leaders do we have? How do we negotiate? How do we view ourselves? How do we want to promote ourselves? What are the main values of the organisation and will they fit in with the goals of the partnership?*
>
> *As management, you need to bring your workers along with you, with training and assistance, so they can work in partnership, not get lost or pushed around. It's got to happen on all levels.*
>
> *Agreements need to be there: they need to be built and documented, so it's beyond the individual. It works against collaboration when people want to work with vested interests and maintain territory.*
>
> *Agencies can be focused on protecting agency turf and corporate image and reputation. We need to move beyond that. The way agencies make decisions is really interesting too: each agency has its own culture; you have to get used to others. How much risk each organisation is prepared to take also really affects joined up service delivery.*

Being strategic about the involvement of people also meant recognising that that the education backgrounds of personnel such as John Geary and Gary Griffin at the LLEN helped the partnership. Gary is Relationship Development Manager at the Goldfields Local Learning and Employment (GLLEN); he notes that having the right people in the network is invaluable. *"Because of our education backgrounds and experience on reference groups, we can walk into the regional office and to Principals at any time. We already have trust with the Principals."*

Finally, Louise Harvey stresses the importance of individual and organisational commitment:

"*People have to put their money where their mouth is. If we're genuine, we all [need to] modify the structure and modality of what we do as individual organisations to accommodate the greater good, be willing to review what we've always done and make changes, and work with other organisations to improve outcomes for young people. Practitioners on the ground work together, but aren't in the position to change the conditions they work within (such as program and funding restrictions), and they often burn out doing this too. In the end, it is leaders who have the power to change the conditions under which people work, so you need to get them around the table and have them become committed to the goals of the partnership.*"

John Bonnice adds that what works in the Consortium is different sectors working together. *"Because we're working together, we're able to deliver a service on the ground to achieve good outcomes. We can then use that work to inform ourselves about the issues that are excluding young people. So we're improving the service and then working together to look at systemic issues."*

In Summary:

The *Connect Central Consortium* is a partnership between eight education institutions and welfare organisations in the Bendigo-Goldfields region of Central Victoria. The Consortium aims to integrate the school-work transition process for young people in the region. It brings practitioners and senior management together for regular **sharing of practice**, **frank conversations** and **community decision making** about the overlaps and gaps in local service delivery to marginalised young people.

The lessons from the Connect Central Consortium are to demonstrate the need for:

» **Generating trust and mutual respect between partners;**
» **Being locally derived and accountable with a shared local intent;**
» **Delivering improved efficacy for partners;** and
» **Being strategic about who is involved.**

Sector Partnering with Transit Guards in Perth

Effective Partnerships Across Organisational Difference

TRUDI COOPER[1], **TERENCE LOVE**[2] AND **FIONA TAYLOR**[3]

The idea for a project to seek solutions to conflict between young people and public transport security personnel originated from a detached youth work team employed by a Local Government Authority.

Initially, we intended the project would use action research principles to test the value of detached youth work teams in station environs. Detached youth work teams would be co-ordinated by local government youth services and work in the station environs. Teams would proactively find ways to address sources of conflict, respond to welfare issues, and work with both groups of young people and security personnel (Transit Guards, rangers, and police) to find ways to avoid situations where young people are moved from one place to the next by different security personnel.

The research project[4] described in this chapter represents

> *... a practical trial of a collaborative interagency approach to the development of integrated*

interventions and strategies to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in rail station environs in four locations in the metropolitan area of Perth, Western Australia. The focus of this research project was to develop and trial a model of interagency collaboration to support the formation of relationships between the Public Transport Authority (PTA), local government community services, community safety personnel and relevant non-governmental organisations. The intent of these collaborations was to develop holistic and constructive integrated responses to prevention of anti-social behaviour by young people in rail environs.[5]

By the time the project commenced, there had been policy changes and key personnel had moved to other positions. Local Government policy had become less supportive of direct deployment of detached youth workers. In response, we used the action-research framework to adapt the project to the changed political climate. We found local government youth services were interested now in looking for ways that youth workers, community safety workers, and the public transport Transit Guards could work together.

Through negotiation, the purpose of the project was reshaped. The purpose of the revised project was to:

> *develop methods for collaboration that enabled organisations with very different purposes and priorities to work together without compromising their own goals and values and without the goals of one group becoming dominant.*

The project had three stages: initial interviews, collaboration and planning, and interventions and outcomes.

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5   Cooper, Love and Donovan, 2007: p 13

Initial interviews

In the initial stages of the project, we interviewed all key stakeholders. We interviewed the Transit Guard manager in a one-to-one interview. (Role changes meant that a different manager was subsequently involved in the project.) We held focus groups in each of four geographic areas to gather initial data from youth and community agencies that were interested in being part of the project. For practical purposes, this created four sub-projects, one in each location. These interviews and focus groups were used to help participants share information about their agency's roles, goals and priorities; and to gather preliminary information about participants' perceptions of problems, the causes of problems, and their relative priority in terms of each organisation's goals.

When we analysed the initial interviews, we found different groups had quite different agendas. In the past, there had been quite a lot of mistrust between Transit Guards and Youth Workers. A key task for the project emerged: to trial a method or process whereby Transit Guards and youth and community agencies could work together, without sacrifice on either part. We found partner organisations wanted to both further their own organisational goals and achieve beneficial results for young people.

As the project progressed, all the partners were able to identify common concerns between Youth Workers and Transit Guards, despite their very different organisational priorities.

From the initial interviews with the Transit Guard manager, we found that Transit Guards saw their primary role as provision of security on trains. Their position was complicated however by the fact that they also had several other roles and responsibilities including checking for fare evasion, and duty of care for vulnerable people. These roles sometimes conflicted. The manager was sympathetic to young people and said that Transit Guards viewed arrest as a 'last resort' when they perceived they had no other options. In the interview he explained that conflict occurred between their duty of care responsibilities and their security responsibilities. Transit Guards could spend several hours trying to find care for a vulnerable person. This occurred most frequently late at night. For example, a young people,

perhaps 13 or 14 years old, would get off a train and have no way to get home. When parents could not be contacted or were unwilling to collect the young person, two Transit Guards had to remain with the young person until some other arrangements could be made for the young person's safety. Crisis agencies were often not able to respond in a timely way. From a security perspective, welfare duties like this prevented Transit Guards from performing security function on trains, and this meant that other vulnerable people on trains had no protection. The Transit Guard manager also reported that other people fleeing from violence sometimes came to stations for refuge, because they knew they would get assistance.

Interview data also revealed that Transit Guard managers wanted to know about any incidents when Transit Officers behaved inappropriately, because, from a management perspective, inappropriate responses by Transit Guards put their colleagues at risk and risked alienating public support.

From interviews with Youth Workers, we found that some had received complaints, mostly about fines and ticketing issues and security on trains. None of the Youth Workers, however, had access to any avenue by which to resolve complaints they received, and none had acted on complaints from young people. As a result, Youth Workers listened empathetically but didn't take complaints any further. None of the Youth Workers had followed up allegations, nor had they supported young people to pursue their complaints. Youth Workers had not been able to influence policy or practices in any way that would avoid future problems.

Initial interviews confirmed that both sides were keen to examine whether collaboration could achieve mutually beneficial results.

Social action and action learning

The project used a 'social action' theoretical framework within an 'action learning' methodological approach. A social action framework encourages participants to identify actions that they, themselves, can take that will contribute to positive change[6] rather than to wait for others to act. Social action uses social group processes to help participants gain a more complex understanding

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6   See for example, Hope and Timmel (1996)

of other participants' perceptions of issues and share responsibility for planning and implementing action to alleviate problems identified. This approach requires a strong commitment to seek ways to minimise the adverse effects of power relationships. The 'action learning' methodology[7] meant the project used cycles whereby action would be planned, then implemented and then reviewed. The learning from the review was then used to plan the next cycle of action or adjust on-going action.

The social action literature[8] emphasises the importance of developing strategies to overcome apathy, and the need to promote optimism that change is possible. This observation is especially pertinent to social action projects like this one that are intended to address longstanding problems that seem intractable. A major obstacle to successful social action can occur if facilitation processes allow people to use meetings as a forum to allocate blame to other people, organisations or bodies.

In this project, therefore, it was seen as important to recognise that the process would need to:

» help participating agencies overcome feelings of apathy and hopelessness;

» overcome the social and political difficulties of interagency collaboration;

» help groups keep a 'solution focus', and maintain impetus over a period of time; and

» avoid the degeneration of groups into inactive 'talking shops'.

Strategies were developed to ensure equality of participation, prevent the process from being co-opted by a single stakeholder or group of stakeholders, and ensure regular 'review' of actions that had been agreed. The two main strategies used for meetings were 'structure' and a 'focus on finding solutions to problems'. When groups had planned actions, regular meetings were scheduled to review outcomes, to share learning, and to replan.

'Structure' in Meetings

During the initial interviews (described above), we met with the Transit Guard manager and with youth and community agencies separately. In the second phase, joint meetings were held between local youth and community organisations and Transit Guards. These meetings were potentially very difficult. Both sides were nervous about the intentions of the other group. Collaboration fails when one party successfully co-opts the whole agenda and expects other participants to work around their priorities. There were also the usual risks that individuals would dominate discussions, and that different stakeholders would attempt to impose their personal priorities and perspectives on the meetings. At each of the first 'joint meetings' in each of the four sub-projects, there was a very high risk that things would go badly wrong and collaboration would fail before it began.

The first few joint meetings in each location were initially very highly structured, especially the first joint meeting between local organisations and the Transit Guard manager. The purpose of tight structure was to limit the ability of any particular group or individual to dominate proceedings. The results were positive in each location and ensured that everyone participated and was heard.

The initial joint meeting used a simple process. Each person who attended was invited to outline the goals, purposes and priorities of their organisation. This was timed and very short. Each person had only one or two minutes. Time was shared equally and people had to be succinct.

In the evaluation, participants identified that this sharing had been one of the most useful parts of the process. Participants discussed how this process challenged their assumptions and stereotypes about other organisations. At all locations these initial stereotypes of participants were challenged. Many Youth Workers reported they had previously thought that Transit Guards were keen to 'throw kids off trains', lock them up, and give them infringements. The Transit Guard manager reported that he had previously thought Youth Workers were gullible 'bleeding hearts' who spent their whole time looking for problems, believing anything that young people told them, and then verbally abusing ordinary hard-working people without enquiring about the veracity or circumstances surrounding allegations. By the end of the meetings Youth Workers realised that the Transit Guards would rather **not** lock up young people if they had options. The Transit Guards realised that Youth Workers had independent critical faculties and didn't

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7   Reg Revans. Many sources; the James Thornton Institute for Leadership and Development offer a useful definition of Action Learning drawn from Revans' work: http://www.jtiltd.com/al_definitions.htm The free library offers open access to his work http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Reg+Revans:+action+learning-a099932544

8   Op cit

unquestioningly believe everything that young people told them.

In the second joint meeting at each location, project participants were invited to share their perceptions of problems. To begin this process, the researchers presented back to participants a rich picture of all the perceptions of issues that had been raised in their location in the preliminary interviews. Each individual was asked to share their interpretation of why the problems identified in their location had emerged. We asked individuals to 'make sense' of the perceptions presented to them. Again, the meeting process was highly structured. We allocated a fixed amount of time to each participant, so they could share their interpretation without interruption. Through this process, participants identified that many of the issues raised were multifaceted and that successful intervention could not be achieved by any single agency working alone. This led the group to seek collaborative solutions they could implement together within the policy and financial constraints of their own circumstances. Each group planned their actions and collaboration according to local concerns, priorities and resources.

A Focus on Solutions

Inevitably, interagency collaboration involves complex social interactions between participants. Power and control issues create tensions between participants in meetings, and other forms of group collaboration. These tensions reduce the potential for solutions to emerge or be implemented. A large part of the difficulty of this project was management of group processes in ways that minimised unhelpful interpersonal conflict, whilst promoting a climate where difference can be shared and explored constructively.

We used a social action framework because this promoted a forward-looking, pro-active approach. The framework used was based upon Freirian principles of community work, and adapted from the six-step process outlined by Hope and Timmel[9] This social action process encourages all participants to deepen their own understanding of the issues faced by the different communities. The underlying reasoning was that, when they have done this, they can develop solutions they can implement themselves.

9   See Hope and Timmel (1996)

Decisions about who to invite to participate at each of the four locations were determined primarily by recommendations from initial partners to the project in each location (usually the local government Youth Officer). We wanted to include at least some people who had a commitment to a 'solution-focus'. In theory and from our experience, the most successful groups included people who:

» had an activist orientation and wanted to develop constructive practical responses to problems identified and not just discuss issues;
» believed that even small-scale changes that bring benefit were worth making, even if they did not provide a complete solution;
» were creative in solving problems and willing to try out new approaches, even when there was a risk of failure; and
» had sufficient seniority to authorise initiatives or can gain authorisation speedily; this occurred when individuals worked in organisations that had sufficient organisational flexibility, but was impeded when organisations were overly bureaucratic.

To some degree, the process at the first joint meeting enabled self-selection of people with these attributes. For example, the first joint meeting in one location was attended by a Youth Worker who wanted to use the meeting as a complaints forum and an opportunity to blame other organisations for local problems. The meeting process allowed her to express her view but did not permit her to make this the primary focus of the discussions. She decided not to attend later project meetings.

The Outcome for Young People

One outcome of the project is that Youth Workers are now able to advocate more effectively for young people who are in conflict with Transit Guards.

The Youth Workers gained a forum where they could air issues with Transit Guard management and actively resolve both individual and systemic practical problems. Through this process, the Transit Guards became aware of additional resources available to help young people and more able to help young people access welfare services.

The Transit Guard manager who participated in the project was sufficiently senior to negotiate systemic change and to quickly respond to individual complaints. In one instance, for example, he was invited to a barbeque at an alternative education program and a young person present told him about an incident that had occurred that morning. The Transit Guard manager was able to investigate immediately, substantiate the complaint, and take action. In this instance, the person involved, who had behaved inappropriately, was a private security contractor rather than a direct employee, and the manager had no training responsibility for the employee, but instructed the security firm not to send that member of staff again. This immediate and open response gave the young people a lot of confidence and helped the Youth Workers realise that the Transit Guard manager would not support staff doing the wrong thing. There followed a useful discussion where the manager explained that not only did such incidents put the public 'off-side', but that other Transit Guards would rather work with colleagues who had good interpersonal skills because this reduces their own risk. From this perspective, Transit Guards who behave inappropriately aggravate aggression, and this puts everyone at risk.

A very beneficial outcome of the project was that all participants achieved a better appreciation of the roles and constraints in each other's work. An additional important outcome of the project was educational. Youth Workers had a better understanding of the difficulties of Transit Guards' work, and were also able to provide more accurate information to young people about legal and other issues. Transit Guards learned more about what Youth Workers are trying to do.

What Worked in this Partnership?

In the project report[10,] we identified the following factors as significant in supporting or inhibiting successful interagency collaboration-building activities.

Factors that supported successful inter-agency collaboration were:

» Processes to build understanding and avoid tensions in the early stages;
» Solution-focused problem solving;
» Respect by agency participants for the different goals and roles of other agencies;
» Inclusion of as many relevant local organisations as possible;
» Appropriate frequency of meeting and meeting length, locally determined by participants;
» Maintenance of an action focus to create realistic short-term achievements; and
» Achievement of small successes early to build confidence and enthusiasm.

Factors found to inhibit interagency collaboration processes were:

» Participants over-constrained by bureaucratic procedures or bureaucratic mindsets;
» Participants without sufficient authority to implement changes or interventions;
» A lack of continuity of involvement of participants;
» Participants with too many or more important competing priorities;
» Conflicts, if allowed to become personal; and
» Key organisations missing from the initial workshops.

In the final part of this chapter, we will discuss three of these factors in detail:

» Managing group dynamics effectively;
» Having a clear understanding of agencies' differences in priorities; and
» Finding a broker.

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10   Cooper, Love, and Donovan (2007, p 71)

Managing group dynamics effectively

We learnt that effective facilitation strategies must be used throughout the process to maintain positive interpersonal group dynamics. This was necessary to avoid conflict and inequality of contribution. Group dynamics had to be managed continually and carefully. From experience, poor group dynamics have the capacity to impede gains made by interagency collaboration. For example, we found that people can be easily offended or feel slighted at things that others might not even have noticed. This happened on two occasions during this project and required time and effort to rebuild trust and confidence. Secondly, we found we had to actively maintain the 'solution focus' in discussions. This focus can be lost easily when groups lose confidence, when members have insufficient power to make agreed change in their own organisations, or if power struggles emerge during discussion. We consider these issues should be anticipated as normal and acknowledged as an expected part of these types of project.

Clear understandings of each agency's priorities

We found it is helpful to inter-agency collaboration to begin from an acknowledgement that agencies have different roles, and to discuss difference and similarity openly in the early stages of collaboration. In this case, discussions enabled the groups to clarify at the beginning that the Youth Workers were not going to be doing the Transit Guards' jobs for them and vice versa. The groups were then able to clarify how they might be able to collaborate without compromising their own work. The process allowed each agency to clarify its own purposes and priorities and to collaborate based upon open acknowledgement of differences in priorities and purpose. We found that this made everyone less defensive about their own work and more open to listening to what others had to say.

We also found that lack of clarity about agencies' priorities had been a major source of misunderstanding and failure in past collaborative projects. Some collaboration partnerships ran into difficulties because partners did not have a clear enough appreciation of their partner agencies' priorities and constraints on action. In some cases, however, problems arose because partner agencies have not been clear enough about their **own** priorities. Youth Workers are particularly susceptible to this when they are not able to articulate clearly the purpose of their work, or when their work is based upon tacit understanding. When this occurs, Youth Workers may be too easily swayed to adopt the priorities of other agencies or may oppose partner agencies' priorities for fear of 'contamination' of their own work. Either response negates what they might have achieved through collaboration. For example, when Youth Workers work with police or with shopping centre security, it is problematic if Youth Workers assume responsibility for a policing role. However, when Youth Workers work antagonistically and in isolation, they lose the capacity to influence policy and practice in other organisations. Both options are limiting.

Find a broker

We learnt that, for effective cross-sectoral partnerships, it is important for Youth Workers to have connections with people in other organisations which are able to address systemic problems. This means that Youth Workers need access to networks of senior staff within partnering organisations. If Youth Workers want to influence how other organisations respond to young people, it is important to have networks at the right level in the partner organisation. The partner needs to be in a position where they can bring about organisational change.

Consider, for example, the situation when a young person approaches a Youth Worker because they are having problems at school and it emerges that the cause of the problem is within the school system. If the Youth Worker does not have a relationship with someone influential in the school, they are unlikely to be able to respond proactively. The Youth Worker has a greater capacity to contribute to systemic change if he or she is able to develop relationships with influential staff in the school.

Sometimes Youth Workers need another organisation to broker that relationship. Youth peak bodies can sometimes act as brokers. Opportunities arise when organisations have enough status to knock on doors. Brokerage may be possible through government departments with responsibility for young people. Brokerage can be used to raise issues and concerns and make connections with people who can change things.

In small communities, it's often possible to do this informally. One strategy is for individual Youth Workers to find a local broker-connector-advocate-mentor. This can be someone influential from a TAFE, University, Rotary Club, or a big school. Their role is to be someone who can help Youth Workers form partnerships with the agencies or institutions at the appropriate level.

Avoiding Tokenistic Youth Participation

One of the biggest concerns with participation and collaboration projects is how to overcome tokenism. In many research projects that involve young people's participation, individual young people represent themselves or their immediate group of mates. For some types of research, this form of participation is entirely appropriate, and can offer essential insight. For other types of research, it can have a negative effect through being tokenistic and partial. The outcomes may also be misleading. Ill-considered methods of recruiting young people to research project often lead to tokenistic participation.

This particular project made a conscious and contentious decision to avoid tokenistic participation by young people. The issue of whether and how to involve young people raised several questions. When we examined these questions, it forced us to think carefully about the **purposes** of the project and the **practicalities** of how many people could be involved in it and still maintain the ability to use group processes effectively. After careful consideration of these questions, we decided not to involve young people directly in project meetings. Our reasons are as follows.

The primary **purpose** of the project was to develop effective means for **organisations** to work together to respond to issues that were already well known. The primary purpose was not to gather new information about the nature and extent of problems, but to examine how organisations could collaborate across difference. For this we needed collaboration by people who work in organisations and have sufficient power to influence organisational policy and practice. From the perspective of the purposes of our project, we needed a conduit that could channel perspectives important to a diverse population of young people. This raised the question of how this should be done.

We considered the **practicalities** of how we could involve young people in this research in a non-tokenistic way. There were two possible means to represent the diversity of young people's experience: through direct participation by young people or through indirect representation of young people.

Direct representation raised selection and retention problems, and questions about numbers. Direct representation of young people by themselves would require continued participation by a sufficiently diverse group of young people over a period of eighteen months. Young people would need to be recruited to represent a range of perspectives, including different ages, socio-economic backgrounds, cultural backgrounds and gender. **How many young people would we need in each location to have a representative sample of young people?** When we thought about this, we did not believe that we could recruit, retain, and support sufficient young people from each important group to represent the diversity of young people's opinions, especially as research by Johanna Wyn[11] indicated that for many young people, participation in research projects is not high amongst their personal priorities.

Further consideration of this issue raised other concerns. At one of the preliminary meetings, one of the Youth Workers indicated she was working with young men who had had conflict with the Transit Guards. She wanted to bring them along to the meetings with Transit Guards. She stated that the purpose was to confront the Transit Guard manager. This drew attention to an additional problem: **If the meeting had been attended by both a group of women who were feeling intimidated on the trains and wanted increased Transit Guard presence, and a group of young men who had had conflict with Transit Guards, whose voices would have been heard?** Our guess is that the young women would have felt intimidated and not voiced their opinions nor come back to another meeting.

Finally, as described earlier in this chapter, it was very difficult to effectively facilitate interagency group dynamics. Inclusion of young people directly representing the diverse views of all young people would have

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11   Oral presentation of her research on young people and participation, 'Are We There Yet?' National Youth Conference 2007

increased the size of groups beyond that which would be manageable within the social action framework. It would also have raised a problem of how to ensure that young people were not used in a tokenistic way to further the agendas of different parties.

Indirect representation of young people raised questions about who could best represent the diversity of perspectives. The Youth Workers in our study had contact with young people of different ages and from different groups, or had networks with these contacts. The nature of the relationship between Youth Workers and young people also meant that young people were able to discuss issues with Youth Workers without fear of retribution.

We considered both options and the purposes of our project and chose the second option because we believed that direct representation would be unrepresentative, tokenistic and would make the project methodology unworkable. We made the decision to ask Youth Workers represent the diverse opinions of young people they knew. If Youth Workers did not feel they could do this, we asked them to find out from young people the diversity of young people's opinions and report their findings to the meetings. We found that, in most instances, the Youth Workers were very aware of the opinions of young people.

In one instance, the Youth Workers decided to survey young people. The results were surprising to some people. The survey found that some of the young people surveyed stated they wanted more Transit Guards because their presence made them safe. We analysed the profile of young people who most strongly expressed this opinion and found that it was most strongly expressed by working class young women whose parents couldn't drive them around and who relied on public transport to travel, especially at night. Their main concern was predatory men on the trains at night who they feared would harass them or pay them unwanted attention.

In Summary

This project was a practical trial of interagency collaboration in four areas of Perth between the Youth Sector and the WA Public Transport Authority Transit Guards. Its aim was to improve outcomes for young people and other stakeholders by improving relationships and understanding between Youth Workers and Transit Guards indirectly through interagency collaboration and direct problem solving, and through systemic and cultural changes. It achieved numerous improved outcomes for young people, ranging from the resolution of fines issues, to the provision of cultural awareness training for pre-service Transit Guards. It provided valuable learning about how a well-structured, well-managed collaboration can address significant misunderstandings and shortcomings between sectors, in this instance the Youth Services and Public Transport sectors.

The project highlighted the difficulties of interagency collaboration in general and the special difficulties when collaboration is with partners who have very different purposes. Collaboration between Youth Workers and the Public Transport Authority brought benefits to Youth Workers and indirectly to young people. It enabled Youth Workers to have influence over policy issues beyond their own organisation, elevated the status of Youth Workers and allowed them to create links that enabled them to be more effective at advocating for change and in supporting young people to take effective action if they had complaints. It also enabled Youth Workers to gain an understanding of the difficulty of the Transit Guard role.

Any collaboration with disparate organisations brings risks that Youth Workers lose sight of their own goals and purposes. Clarity about roles and purposes offers Youth Workers some protection against this risk, and enables them to affect change beyond their own organisation without compromising their primary purposes and values.

This project ended more than a year ago. Some relationships have remained strong despite personnel changes. We believe the basic process is useful and transferable to other settings.

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Hope, A. and Timmel, S. (1996). Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers. Gweru, Zimbabe: Mambo Press.

In Summary:

A collaborative interagency approach around integrated interventions and strategies was developed to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in rail station environs in four locations in the metropolitan area of Perth, Western Australia. The focus was to develop and trial a model of interagency collaboration between the Public Transport Authority (PTA), local government community services, community safety personnel and relevant non-governmental organisations. The intent of these collaborations was to develop holistic and constructive integrated responses to prevention of anti-social behaviour by young people in rail environs.

The lessons from this trial are about the need for:

» **Managing group dynamics effectively;**
» **Having clear understandings of each agency's priorities;**
» **Finding a broker;** and
» **Avoiding tokenistic youth participation.**

Section C:
Partnering with Schools

Youth Workers in Secondary Schools and TAFE

Youth Support Coordinators in Queensland

THROUGH THE VOICES OF: MARK BUCKLAND, KRISTY CARR AND **TANYA STEVENSON**

WITH COMMENTS FROM: **LYN SCOUGALL, STACEY BEU, MANNLY DUBROY, PAUL SCULLY, BRUCE KINGSTON** AND **MONIQUE, DESTINY AND TURNER**

The Youth Support Coordinators (YSC) program in Queensland is a joint initiative between the Department of Communities (DoCs) and the Department of Education, Training and the Arts (DETA) that provides 113 Youth Support Coordinators to secondary schools and TAFEs across Queensland. The Youth Support Coordinators assist young people still connected to education and/or training to move into and through the senior phase of learning. They have a target population of young people at risk of leaving school early. Their role can include individual work, group work and community development activities.

This story draws on information from the Hervey Bay YSC as an example of the overall YSC program in action. Hervey Bay is a coastal town, 300 kilometres north of Brisbane. It is a popular tourist destination, famous for whale watching and accessing Fraser Island. It is also a popular retirement and sea-change destination, and has

consequently undergone rapid growth in recent decades. Before looking at how the program operates here, let's explore the broader context.

The YSC Program

Hundreds of secondary schools (government and non-government) and TAFEs across Queensland currently have YSCs working within their schools. YSCs are each employed by a community agency, which manages, supports and reports on the YSC work. The agency sets the standards and ethos for their work and provides a network of connection within the local welfare sector.

The YSC workers operate under a centralised Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between DoCs and DETA that provides operational guidelines for how YSCs engage with schools and TAFEs across Queensland.

The schools need to agree to this state-wide MoU if the YSC is going to work with them. However, whilst the initial program guidelines suggested that YSCs' work priorities be guided by a locally-based committee with representatives from a variety of education and welfare agencies, this recommendation has not been universally applied across the state.

Most of the YSCs come from social work, social sciences or psychology backgrounds, with experience working in the youth sector. Schools tend to prefer YSCs with counselling qualifications, rather than those with community development qualifications. As there are no University courses specifically focusing on youth work in Queensland (although a number of TAFE institutions offer Diplomas in Youth Work), there are consequently few specifically trained youth workers working as YSCs.

The Queensland Youth Housing Coalition Inc. employs three YSC Hub Facilitators to facilitate the *YSC Network* to support the development of the YSC program and to promote sharing of resources and professional practice between YSCs. The YSC Network is a strong community of practice that has developed over many years and provided input into the YSC program at systemic levels, including the state-wide MoU.

Funding

The YSC program is funded by the Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts and administered by the Department of Communities. YSC programs are tendered for by local non-government organisations. Contracts are awarded to successful agencies by the Department of Communities (which is also responsible for service agreement monitoring). The auspicing agency is funded to provide management and to employ suitably qualified YSCs.

Additionally, the YSC program mandates auspicing organisations to provide each YSC with an annual program budget of $10,000 that must be used directly on goods and services that are of direct benefit to young people. The YSC budget is tiny in comparison to the budgets of schools, yet schools and YSCs refer to this repeatedly as an important component of the program. It seems crucial that the YSC can design and run programs without having to compete through the school system for limited resources.

Stacey Beu, who is Head of Department at Urangan State High School and Manager of GAP (Great Alternate Program) endorses the importance of this budget: *"The fact that she has a budget makes a really big difference. She has the ability to run classes and provide resources. I think that's the real bonus."*

The Local Partnership

The Youth Support Coordinator in Hervey Bay works at Urangan State High School (1700 students), Hervey Bay High School (800 students), the Urangan High School alternative setting campus – Great Alternate Program (GAP) (40 students) and at Glendyne Education and Training (70 students). The auspicing agency In Hervey Bay is *Lifeline*, Fraser Coast.

In Hervey Bay, the regional Education Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF) committee makes local decisions about the nature of the YSC's role, decides which schools deserve priority, whether the role of the YSCs within schools will be individual work, group work, programs-based and what local issues should be addressed.

The following information is directly drawn from the work of Tanya Stevenson as Hervey Bay Youth Support Coordinator, but also, through the comments of Mark Buckland, YSC Hub Facilitator for South East Queensland and Kristy Carr, YSC Hub Facilitator for Regional-Rural-Remote Queensland. Both are former Youth Support Coordinators, and provide an insight into general program learnings across the state.

Strategies

Youth Support Coordinators in schools and TAFEs adapt good quality youth work to a school environment, focusing on four main strategies: **empowering young people, advocacy for their rights and using a strengths based approach**; **case work** with young people; **interpreting schools** for young people; and acting as a **bridge between schools and the community sector**.

The **empowerment of young people, advocacy for their rights and a focus on their strengths** rather than their deficiencies – within a social justice analysis of disadvantage – are all approaches brought into schools by YSCs.

"What's possible in this role," says Mark Buckland, *"is that you reinterpret the negatives placed around a young person. A young person perceived by the school as having 'attitude' can be seen by a YSC as a young person with an inquiring mind. You can redescribe education as being relevant to a young person rather than an imposition on a young person."*

A 'strengths based' perspective allows YSCs to reward and encourage the development of values and pursuits that are not permitted or valued within the curriculum. Mark continues: *"Working as a youth worker in a school allows you to acknowledge the values embedded within learning processes. And it allows the young people who may not be given the credit within schooling situations to be given agency as change agents. You can introduce to them a value and role that the naughty kid in the school system has never been given before. You can help young people to see that, with education, you can become a voice in facing an issue like global warming, rather than a victim."*

YSCs typically handle an individual case-load within each school. These **young people are case-managed** specifically by the YSC during their time within the school, using individual casework and assisted referrals to outside agencies. Group programs are also delivered by YSCs in response to young people's needs as identified by the school or the YSC.

Tanya Stevenson describes school as 'very supportive': *"They have a never-ending list of students for me to see. My role is as a support person in the school, for the students."* Students from Urangan State High School and GAP (not their real names) describe her approach: *"She teaches us how to control our anger, teaches us what assertiveness is, gives us advice on how to do things, and how **not** to do things."* (Destiny) *"She made it so she could talk to every one individually; there were only four or five people in the group – people we knew."* (Monique) *"She treats us with respect. [She's] someone to talk to. You don't want to talk to the teachers about stuff in case it changes their point of view about stuff, but you talk to Tanya and it just helps.*

You'd rather talk to Tanya 'cos she knows more about it. It's like ... if you want to buy a bike, who are you going to talk to: your friend or the other friend who works in the bike shop? Tanya knows a lot about stuff that I come to her about." (Turner)

As an employee of a community agency, a YSC has greater flexibility than do school-based welfare staff. They can conduct case-management work beyond school hours and beyond the school gate. Mannly Dubroy, Guidance Officer at Urangan state High School) notes that: *"The youth worker can deal with many issues ... has more flexibility. She can leave the school, can come and go."*

As such, the YSC's focus can be wider than the school's boundaries in addressing all barriers to staying at school and succeeding. Mark refers to this as 'working with multiple clients': *"The primary focus is on young people but we also facilitate change in the support systems around them: schools, families, and communities."*

A Youth Support Coordinator coming into a school can help **interpret schools for young people** by bringing an adult perspective to bear on how decisions are made, how young people are marginalised and how discipline structures work. Working with individuals and small groups, YSCs are able to help young people understand the processes leading to their exclusion, failure or unhappiness at school. This acknowledges that many young people experience extreme conflict and hardship within their daily experience of school and that YSCs, being located within a school, can intervene strategically with young people who are at risk of disengaging from school.

Mark Buckland describes the job of YSC as: *"increasing knowledge of how school systems work for young people. [Our job is] interpreting for kids the adult world that many 'at risk' kids struggle with."*
The YSCs are able to help young people develop strategies to survive and succeed within the school. Precisely because they do not have to maintain a position of authority, and because they are skilled at developing egalitarian, friendly relationships with young people, they can talk frankly and respectfully about the functioning of the school. They are able to be an independent third party, observing conflict between schools and young people, and aware of the difference in

power between the two parties.

A key aspect of the YSC approach is partnership building within communities. YSCs play an important role as **a bridge between the community sector and schools**. YSCs can help strengthen relationships between schools and outside agencies.

This involves both a role *"to link young people into appropriate services"*, as Kristy Carr acknowledges, but also *"broadening the school's interaction with community agencies such as youth homelessness services, family support services or mental health services"*. Mark Buckland says that: *"The value of the YSC being employed and connected outside of the school, but working within the school, is that the schools are first to know about young people's distress but are least able to help them. So we are best placed with our connection to community... As a YSC, you can bring services and agencies into the school to run group work or special programs." "In some ways,"* he says, *"a YSC acts as the interpreter for young people in the school system. But you also interpret the school system for the community sector."*

Bruce Kingston, Manager of Training Employment Support Services Inc in Maryborough, points to the YSCs' contribution to team approaches: *"It offers another level of services that many of our current staff don't have the skills for. It strengthens the whole team approach when they start to case-manage kids. When there's a problem with a particular kid or group, it brings in a whole new set of support to the team. Quite often the YSC has worked with these kids on other programs. They're able to give valuable insight into how the kids have behaved on other programs: what works, what doesn't: 'These are his buttons. I know how to handle him. I know the parents. I'll follow that up.'"*

Outcomes

The main outcomes for young people of the Youth Support Coordinator initiative, that schools, YSCs and young people have observed are **improved understanding and relationships between schools and marginalised young people**; and **improved access to youth services for young people in schools**.
The YSCs have many stories about mended relationships that have allowed young people to stay in or return to school. There is strong anecdotal evidence of the role of the YSC program in improving retention and attainment, by its facilitation of **improved understanding and relationships between schools and marginalised young people**.

Mannly Dubroy, in his role as Guidance office has seen positive outcomes: *"particularly of students running through a plan program, with communication skills and assertiveness programs. I can see the change in behaviour of the students who have been working with her [the YSC]. The students are making the right decisions now – wiser decisions."*

Destiny supports this: *"It's helped me with behaviour: how to talk to teachers; how not to; how to control things, if someone's yelling at me."*

Tanya Stevenson summarises outcomes: *"The majority are improving their behaviour and concentration in class and staying in school."*

Secondly, YSCs provide **improved access to youth services for young people in schools**. In 2006, 7,800 young people in Queensland chose to access assistance or referral through a Youth Support Coordinator within a school or TAFE. *"A lot of young people don't know about community agencies, so I'm that link,"* says Tanya. *"It's really valuable for the YSC role – having the connections, especially within Centrelink or Child Safety."*

Similarly, many young people who are in need of assistance do not have access to youth services through lack of knowledge or mis-conceptions. Mark describes *"opportunities for discrete help seeking. Young people who may be vulnerable but would never access a community service in their own time, and would never wag school to do so, can come up to you on the school playground, very discretely, and say: 'Can I come talk to you?' Being in schools puts us on a preventive early intervention framework."*

Lyn Scougall, coordinator of Student Services at Urangan State High School says that it makes for: *"a healthier environment for the kids if they can access the people they need when they need them most."*

What Works in the YSC Welfare/ Education Partnerships?

The Youth Support Coordinator program provides us with five distinct lessons about how youth work practice can be successfully achieved in partnership with schools.

First, it is evident in YSC partnerships that **each partner needs to value what the other partner has to offer** for effective youth work to occur within schools. There are three stages to this process. Schools, youth workers and community agencies need first of all to **understand** what each other does and has to contribute; secondly, they need to **mutually value** these contributions; and thirdly, they need to **critically value each contribution**, that is, evaluate the extent to which each partner's potential contribution is actually being fulfilled.

There is a danger in partnerships between youth work and education that schools will believe, on the one hand, that they don't need youth work or that youth workers will undermine discipline, and that youth workers, on the other hand, will believe that schools are purposefully excluding marginalised young people. For a partnership between youth work and a school to work, there needs to be genuine valuing from schools of the unique and essential contribution of youth work: providing an effective, non-judgemental, locally networked case-management approach. There equally needs to be a genuine valuing by youth workers that schools are doing their core business of education well, and that they are aiming to facilitate all young people reaching their personal and intellectual potential.

If either of these valuings isn't warranted in practice – where youth work or education is done poorly – then the partnership is unlikely to succeed. Kristy Carr acknowledges that: *"You need a clear definition of roles as well that recognises that you do work in different paradigms: that welfare and education have different focuses. You need a clear understanding of what's positive about what you each bring for the young people: a clear understanding and appreciation of the skills that both of you bring." "You need to value both welfare and education provision. That needs to be worn on the sleeve,"* says Mark.

As an isolated youth worker amongst a large number of educators, a YSC must also maintain a strong sense of the uniqueness and value of their own contribution. Mark summarises this:

> **"***You need a sense of self within your work. As a YSC, you are working in a place where your practice and culture is not the dominant one. You need an ability to be diplomatic, but also to have an expectation of other people that you will be respected and validated in your work. 'Partnershipping' requires being able to be visionary and practical, collaborative and autonomous all in the same parcel.***"**

So the question arises: 'What practices and outcomes are unique to youth work, which can be contributed to schools?' Acknowledging and answering this question can lead to a recognition that, if YSCs coming into schools are valued **solely** for being an extra welfare professional and are expected to fit into existing welfare approaches, their contribution may be diminished. On the other hand, if schools learn from the positive experiences with YSCs conducting youth work, they will recognise the value of these different approaches. The success of the YSC program is that it is a social work practice that is respectful and non-clinical, with someone who listens – someone who has time to help with whatever problems a young person is facing.

Kristy describes community agencies coming into schools as: *"broadening them and making them more dynamic."* Mark describes this as *"a merging of language – integrating the jargons of both sectors."* As a new practice area, he says that: *"we need to have both patient expectation and some time and opportunities for dialogue to develop these practices, rather than relying on developing understandings out of grievance."*

And this takes time. Both schools and YSCs commented that the partnership only gathered momentum once it was able to **prove its worth over time**.

Paul Scully is Manager of *Lifeline*, Fraser District, the auspicing community agency. *"It's about developing credibility,"* he says. *"Because schools are so rightfully protective of young people and don't know who that worker is and what they're going to do, you really have to make sure you*

get the runs on the board. If you 'stuff up', they won't want to give you the freedom to do your job."

Kristy reflected on the experience of many YSCs:

"When a YSC starts in a school, you need to be very clear about your role. It's important, as a YSC in a school, to develop good relationships with the other school support staff, learning what's already happening, before starting more activities – working with schools around their identified needs. For example, if there's a culture of self-harming amongst some young people, the YSC will develop a program with the school to tackle that issue. Addressing whatever issue the school is struggling with, within the YSC role, can be a good starting point to develop a relationship with the school – to demonstrate your skills and capacities. The school feels supported. Once you've helped to address one of the student welfare issues the school was struggling with, then you can start to develop your role within the school."

In addition to proving worth over time, YSCs need to develop strong relationships and understandings of each school culture over time. Misconceptions and fears on each side of these partnerships break down if a YSC remains within each school for several years and is friendly, reliable and competent.

Tanya identifies ***commitment, communication, courage*** and ***consistency*** as vital:

*"To build relationships, you have to **commit**, in order to see anything happen. You can't have people changing every three months. Also you've got to communicate to the schools that you're not there to tell them what's wrong with their school or that they're not doing a good job with the students. This can take a lot of **courage** as in the beginning you get so many stories from students about the terrible things teachers do and you want to confront them. But you need to make sure you hear both sides of those stories.*

It will also take a while for teachers to get used to you. In the beginning, teachers thought I was there for classroom management. It took them a while to work out I was there in an advocacy role to try to

*help students find a pathway back into school after suspension or 'juvi'. You need to **communicate** lots of times what your role is and you have to really be **committed** to it – as they can see if you are only half hearted about it.*

Consistency *is also very important as I'm very conscious that it loses credibility if I'm meant to be there and I'm not. First the kids will lose trust in you, and second they will cause a big fuss at reception, and the school will ask you not to come in as you cause problems. So I'm very careful to stick to the days I'm scheduled to be in each school."*

There was some initial resistance from schools who did not want to give YSCs access to their students. Where a YSC has demonstrated their effectiveness by helping a school with one identified problem, that school has often become their champion, encouraging other schools to facilitate YSC work within their school. In many regions, YSCs have been granted access to one school initially, and have built a regional reputation from good practice within this one school. A positive reference from one school has been more effective at gaining YSC entry into other schools than has advocacy or lobbying. Kristy describes: *"Once a Principal speaks positively about the YSC, it encourages other schools to invite the YSC in."*

This style of youth work within schools will not suit all youth workers. Many skilled and committed youth workers would find the position – particularly the isolation and the constraints on their advocacy work – untenable. It is therefore crucial that this type of partnership **employ people with bridge building capabilities**.

"You have to be pleasant but political when you first start in a school," says Tanya. *"I would strongly advise against going in thinking that you're better than them. You have to try and build a relationship with the people you work with in the schools. If you don't have a relationship with them, they're not going to know your name or want to work with you or give you referrals. If you don't make an effort to try and get to know them and understand what they're for, they won't give you anything. You have to be respectful of what their job is; sometimes when a teacher is harsh that's OK. They have to do their job. You have to work as a team."* In their first months of working as a youth worker in a

school, YSCs need social confidence and a willingness to be friendly even when it's not reciprocated, particularly if, as in the YSC program, their week is split across a number of schools. For most of the week, YSCs don't have a regular, social, supportive work environment at their agency. In moving between schools (generally they are spread across four or more schools), they do not have continuity and regularity there either.

"YSC coordination is quite a complex role," notes Mark. *"It needs someone who can manage a whole host of roles within the now. It needs someone who is quite dynamic. Because you are working across a range of schools, you might not feel like you have an office, or a home-base."*

Kristy points out that: *"There's an element to this work that is about sitting in grey areas as well. When you initiate a new partnership – a YSC commencing in the school – there is a period of lots of uncertainty for both partners about how the partnership is best going to work."*

In addition, they point out, there are important points about being accepted. Mark warns: *"If you are anti-system and anti-education, you are going to have more difficulties in building dense and diverse relationships within a school"* and Kristy emphasises local networking skills: *"In rural and remote areas, it's about the community coming to trust you. You build that up. Our experience is that YSCs in rural and remote areas benefit from living in the area."*

But this 'bridge building' is not simply a requirement on youth workers. Schools also need to empower some staff members to act as these bridges. Stacey Beu says that, in Hervey Bay's case: *"It didn't work to start with. There were two YSCs before Tanya but we hardly saw them – they moved on. I was Tanya's contact at the school to show her round, and make sure she had everything she needed. She was my responsibility, to make sure it worked. It was really important that we made her feel at home. Unless you have a contact at the school – helping you to get a computer, a desk, filing cabinet, those kind of things – you're unlikely to get those resources."*

Schools generally don't put a lot of time into outside personnel coming into schools. They're too busy. The fact that the school allocated someone to liaise with her, to make sure she was happy, to fight her battles

for her – that was a key thing. This was driven from the administration team as part of their vision to make the partnership work.

Tanya argues: *"Schools should sort out what they expect from a youth worker. If schools can be upfront about it right from the beginning, you don't waste that first three months. They should try and be welcoming, give the youth worker a chance, and don't be too hard on them. Usually people in a school have been working together for a long time: it's hard to get in. Student services can provide a contact and support for outside agencies and make them more comfortable while working in school."*

A further learning is that the YSC program very deliberately **locates youth workers in schools, but employs them via a community agency**.

Kristy advocates that its valuable for the YSC to sit outside the school system. *"We can't emphasise enough how the feedback from our 1999 evaluation is ... how valuable it is that the YSC sits outside the school system and the discipline system."*

Stacey Beu points out that *Lifeline* (the YSC auspicing agency in Hervey Bay) is Tanya's line manager. *"They can provide a sounding board outside of the school. That's why we value it. I don't know that she'd get that support in the school. They can keep everything she does in perspective. It's really good to have someone outside of the school environment to support her, otherwise I am sure that she would have been overloaded and would have floundered."*

Bruce Kingston endorses this independence: *"The YSC are able to distance themselves in terms of discipline and code of behaviour. They can float where they need to float and can cross boundaries, which some of the (teaching) staff can't do"* and Tanya similarly notes that: *"Sometimes the kids feel more comfortable knowing that you're not employed by the school."*

The community agency can also provide a strong back up and support for the YSC in their relationships with schools. Tanya's line manager, Paul Scully, points to his role: *"When you first go there, from a manager's point of view, you have to support your staff, go with them to meet the Principal, convey that it's important to you to find that*

common ground, and be aware what the potential issues are, up front."

Finally, it has proved highly successful in the YSC program that the **youth workers are part of a state-wide structure.** They make use of a state-wide MoU in defining their relationships with schools, are networked with other YSCs via Hubs, which can also engage in political lobbying and advocacy. The MoU includes minimum conditions, such as a private office suitable for confidential counselling during the time the YSC is working within the school. There is a mixture of agency, school, community and state government control over the operations of the YSC program.

"It's been really good to have the MoU from above," says Tanya. *"Many YSCs had dramas that schools weren't willing to let them know everything without informing the school. The MoU sets the boundaries from the beginning and lets the schools know what is expected of them if they choose to have a Youth Support Coordinator."* Paul Scully agrees: *"It's been really helpful that the MoU was there in the YSC program and what it was asking was quite reasonable. It has worked because it's met our agenda and presumably it's met the schools' agenda too. It's been easy to find common ground through that document."*

The need for Regional Hubs to reduce the isolation of YSCs was a finding of the first program evaluation. There are three Regional Hub coordinators who facilitate e-lists, telelinks, professional development, conferences and support for YSCs. They are also well placed to accumulate and observe trends in disadvantage faced by young people dealing with schools, the issues YSCs face in their work, and to gather data and present it in advocacy at higher levels of government. If the YSC program provided funding for schools to employ youth workers, this level of co-ordination and independence wouldn't occur.

Kristy Carr and Mark Buckland describe their roles. *"We receive feedback from YSCs about issues they're facing in schools,"* says Kristy. *"We participate in a state-wide reference group which also has YSCs sitting on it. We have a platform where we can take issues that need a 'top down' response."* Mark adds comments about their responsibilities for addressing policy issues: "*

"We gather the observations of people on the ground and then, with them, take a position paper to the Education Department. We can then speak on behalf of education providers on the issues they can't speak about. We can also speak about issues within the practice of education. We try to distil themes from those incidents reported to us as Hubs. For example, in relation to school fee-paying: some schools were very facilitative and sympathetic, while others were excluding kids. We developed a position paper after gathering this data and went to a high level of government and tried to get policy change.

Governments have policies that talk about the inclusion of all students. Schools are required to be socially inclusive. But there's a risk for schools if they talk about sensitive issues like gay families. One Ministerial complaint, and the school moves into panic mode. We can go to Ministerial level and draw a flow chart of responses at all level to these issues. We can give voice to those very contested, excluded voices. We can lobby for political voice and coherence on these issues – pointing out incongruence between policy and social outcomes. Education can only speak up to its own bureaucracy, but we can advocate across many government departments. "

In Summary:

The YSC program provides Youth Support Coordinators to secondary schools and TAFEs across Queensland to assist young people to move into and through the senior phase of learning. These workers operate under a centralised Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Departments, community organisations and the schools, but are managed by the local community agency.

The lessons from the YSC program are about the need to:

» **Value what each partner has to offer**;
» **Prove your worth over time**;
» **Employ people with bridge building capabilities**;
» **Locate youth workers in schools, but employ them via a community agency**; and
» **Position youth workers as part of a state-wide structure**.

Youth Workers on Staff
Sevenoaks Senior Secondary College, Perth

THROUGH THE VOICES OF: **BROOKE CHAPMAN** AND **DR KATH PARTRIDGE**

WITH COMMENTS FROM: **ALISON WONG, SHARON COLLINS** AND **TASH, RACHEL, TRAVIS, KELLY AND STEPH** [1]

Since its inception in 2001, Sevenoaks Senior Secondary College, in Perth, has employed full-time youth workers as members of its staff. These youth workers are embedded within the school's welfare approach and are valued and respected by teaching and administrative staff, as well as by the large number of students they work with. They conduct generalist youth work through case-management, group programs and referrals – but have adapted this to a school context.

Sevenoaks is located approximately ten kilometres south of the Perth CBD, in a multicultural, working class neighbourhood. The Senior College currently has 500 Year 11 and 12 students enrolled from across the Perth metropolitan area. Approximately two thirds of these students come from the local suburbs of Cannington and Maddington. The College is considered a 'flag-ship school' in young adult learning environments in Western Australia and explicitly describes three important features of the school in its Annual Reports:

» students are treated by staff as young adults, capable of making their own decisions;
» there are school-based and off-campus opportunities for apprenticeships and traineeships; and
» there are several alternative education options for those who disengage from the mainstream.

1 Students in Years 10 and 11 at Sevenoaks – not their real names.

The College's 2006 Annual Report describes the young people in the alternative education setting, where one of the Sevenoak's youth workers is based:

" *Typically our students have significant 'outside' issues to deal with before they can effectively engage with their schooling... A factor common to all is that none have experienced success at school for a long time; most are long term disengaged and have 'flown beneath the radar' for years either in class or by just not turning up to school. This has resulted, for almost all students, in low self-esteem, alienation from their peers, as well as emotional and mental health issues. Of the increased number of boys we are enrolling, an issue is emerging of long term learning difficulties that are either undiagnosed or have not been addressed.* "

History and Goals

Since Sevenoak's establishment in 2001, the then Principal, David Wood, and the new Principal, Dr Kath Partridge, have made a commitment to the employment of a school-based youth worker. Kath explains the school ethos:

" *We're somewhat different from most senior schools in the way we manage and talk with students. We're one of the first senior campuses in WA that has a culture of young people being mature and work focused. We try to build their work skills and capacities and treat the students with a lot of respect; we teach them about mutual respect and how to treat each other. All staff role-model these behaviours.*

I always thought that we needed someone with special skills in relationships and communication with young people to help us build that ethos.

Whilst psychologists have special skills, we wanted different skills and capacities: relationships and communication – people who could act as conduits to build social and community capacity within the college. We wanted them acting to build our social fabric with community agencies and to bring those people into the school, to work with the kids, speak their language, understand where they're coming from, give very practical and professional input, but be very realistic and street wise about the issues these kids are going through on a day to day basis. We wanted them to have the personal strengths and qualities to get out there on the street to find the services they need.

We have a school approach that every child can and should be helped in some way. If we can't help a child, then we find who can work with them and bring them in. "

Currently, Sevenoaks employs two youth workers. One of these workers (Brooke Chapman) works within the 'mainstream' part of the school. In 2006, she worked with 129 individual students from a cohort of approximately 450. The other youth worker (Sharon Collins) works within the alternative education section, called Canning Skills, where a Year 10 equivalency course is taught that includes many life skills. In 2006, Sharon worked with 42 individual students within this program.

Strategies

There are two dominant strategies used by the youth workers at Sevenoaks.

Since each of the youth workers at Sevenoaks has had years of experience in community-based youth work, they firstly bring those skills and experiences to the College and adapt these to engage in **high quality youth work in a school context**. The main approaches they use are:

» *Case-management*: assisting students with any and all issues they are facing. Brooke describes this: "I ask: 'What is it that you need right now?' and 'If I could help you, how do you think I could help you?'. *It's as if I have a tool bag and pull it out and ask: 'Could any of these help right now?'* If they say: 'Yes', I pull that out. If we decide to go to an agency, I explain what it will be like, and ask: 'Does that look scary?'"

» *Interacting with young people in a friendly and relaxed manner.* "I try to normalise young people's situations for them so they feel less isolated," says Brooke. "I try to show them that I'm human too in the way that I communicate. *I have a relaxed way of presenting. I just don't let them know that, in the back of my mind, I'm assessing all the issues they are raising with me.*"

» *Being respectful, non-judgemental, but solution-oriented.* Travis, a Year 10 student at the College, describes Brooke's approach: "She doesn't judge me for telling her something. *She talks to me like I'm a person and not just someone that's got problems.*"

» *Developing special activities or group programs.* The youth workers respond to their observations or information of trends in risk-taking behaviour within the school by setting up group programs. Brooke refers to an anger management group and a young mums' group and adds: "*If there are a number of students dealing with the same issue, I'll ask them if they'd like to work in a group.*"

» *Maintaining confidentiality.* This is the feature that young people most frequently comment upon and appreciate. Travis explains: "*She always keeps things to herself*, won't bring it up with my mum – not like all counsellors or teachers … When you talk to a teacher, you feel like you see them everyday and you don't want to open up to them 'cos they'll tell someone else – which most teachers do. Brooke keeps it in the room, and doesn't treat you different. I never had anyone do that to me before; it's had a big effect on me."

There are some crucial differences between what the youth workers at Sevenoaks do and other forms of welfare work that are conducted in communities or within schools. The youth workers have *adapted* youth work to a school context in the following ways:

» *Meeting students in a more formal environment.* Brooke compares contexts: "When I was working at the youth centre, you could go for a walk, or hang out with an individual or group of young people for a while and get to know them. *In less formal settings it's OK to lay around on the grass and have chats, but in a school I would think twice about that.* You could be a bit more relaxed with language as well [but] I try not to swear here. In a drop-in centre you can talk about whatever you like, but in a school system, you have to work within that system."

» *Accessing and finding young people to work with is very simple in a school.* In working within a school, the workers have brought their youth work approach and 'tool box' to where most young people are – six hours a day, five days a week, forty weeks of the year. Brooke reflects on this access: "*Because of your accessibility to young people, you are able to work more effectively, because you don't have to focus your work energy on finding the young people.* I worked in local government previously, and a lot of our energy was spent on trying to create programs to attract the young people. Here it's a one-stop shop: they're here."

» *Young people are not present in a voluntary capacity.* A central premise of youth work is that young people seeking assistance relate to you in a voluntary relationship. This can be undermined in a school setting, where students are compelled to attend school and where a teacher, head of department or Principal may instruct a student to see the youth worker. This poses some dilemmas for Brooke: "In a school, the young people, sometimes their parents, and the teachers and the Principal and the Department of Education – they are *all* your clients. In the youth sector, when they are voluntary clients, you can run with them as their advocate. *Within a school, they are sometimes involuntary clients,* which can change young people's perception [of you] from a youth worker helping them, to being just another person with power. So I spend time trying to alter that perception – to seeing me as a helper – before we can get anywhere."

Secondly, the youth workers at Sevenoaks College make many referrals that **connect students with welfare providers**. The school allows the youth workers to take young people to appointments, to participate in local networks and to maintain, within their working day, their professional connections. Sharon Collins, youth worker with the alternative education section, describes the importance of this aspect of her work:

" *We organise agency visits for young people, getting outside people to come in and introduce themselves to staff and students, to expose them to support services. We take a lot of our students to appointments; it's about them feeling empowered and comfortable. We fought very strongly that it's crucial that we're flexible to go out of school and interact and network. We brought that idea with us: not to be school-based, but to get out there and show what's there; take them to their first appointments till they feel ready to take that on themselves. "*

Outcomes for young people

Three significant outcomes have been identified for students at Sevenoaks from having school-based youth workers.

First, there is strong anecdotal evidence that **attendance and retention have improved** due to the work of these youth workers since the school's inception. Brooke attributes this to a 'more holistic approach to the young person': "*Getting them out of bed in the morning; addressing the reasons why they don't come to school. Just getting to school can be an issue: not having money to get here or not having lunch money. I remember working with one young person and the reason he wasn't attending school was that he had so many drug rehabilitation appointments. But the law had changed and he was meant to be at school. We could say: 'Come to school and we can take you to those appointments'. If one part of their life is being neglected, it's going to impact on their education.*"

Kelly, a student at the College, agrees: "*If she wasn't here, I would've just walked out of school and gone home lots of times. You could end up failing 'cos you've got so much on your chest and you can't concentrate and don't do your work, and can get in trouble. Instead, you come and tell*

Brooke and then you can go back to work."

This outcome is most apparent in the alternative education classrooms at Sevenoaks, where Alison Wong, one of the teachers here, notes: *"The needs of our kids are really extreme; if we're going to provide (and this is an issue of equity), some kids come with more baggage than others."* She points to the particular role of the youth worker in supporting students' and the program's needs: *"Without that role, this program can't exist. It provides the kids with the opportunity to get an education, because Sharon is the buffer. On an ad hoc basis, I could look for accommodation for kids etc, but I can't do that all the time."*

Secondly, the youth workers at Sevenoaks are **improving relationships between teachers and students**. This occurs through a de-escalation of conflict, greater understanding (by teachers) of the reasons a young person is being disruptive or is not completing work, and (by students) of the reasons a teacher is disciplining a young person. Travis describes one incident and how Brooke assisted:

> **"** *A week ago, a teacher was talking to Brooke about me getting upset and walking out. As soon as I get here, she sorts it out. She gets the teacher's side and my side – doesn't take sides, but finds out the information and what I'm doing wrong and what he might be doing wrong. She doesn't get involved in it, but finds out if there's anything she can do to help both of us. That's better than me pissing off down the shops and wagging: better to come here. Just talking it out with Brooke about what's going on, changed things with that teacher. When you come back here and talk about it, you find out more who's to blame. I could see the teacher's side of it more. The first time I came, he'd rung Brooke and, after a bit of a talk, I realised it wasn't his fault and maybe I had something to contribute and I went back to class and shut up and did work.* **"**

Alison Wong notes that: *"A lot of the causes of problems in classroom are not work related but outside; kids come in hungry, pissed off with someone or at a train fine, have been kicked out of accommodation. We can channel them to the youth worker and they come back to the class knowing that those issues are being dealt with. Then we can get on with the work."*

Thirdly, the outcome of one of the key strategies: **increased awareness of and access to local welfare services by young people**, is crucial to school-based youth work. Sharon recognises the importance of: *"the support [being] there: knowing where to go for help, rather than starting from scratch; someone exploring options for them; assisting them to build those relationships and gain rapport with other services; making them aware of services that exist. If you've never been exposed to youth services, you don't know to go there."*

The Partnership

In this partnership between youth work and education, the youth workers are employed directly by the school. They are also bridge, interface and interpreter between the local welfare sector and the school. As they had many years of experience working in local council housing services in the City of Canning (where Sevenoaks is located), they have taken their local networks and connections into the school, and can take students to local agencies.

The College funds Brooke and Sharon from within its own budget. Dr Kath Partridge, College Principal, describes this arrangement: *"I find the money. I'm not given money by the Department of Education to employ them but I make use of flexibility within the WA staffing formula and also some grant money for engagement programs. The Department very much see the rewards we gain from having youth workers on staff and, whilst they don't fund it directly, they are supportive and provide enough flexibility in the funding model for it to be possible."*

What works in the Sevenoaks school-based youth workers partnership?

There are three distinct learnings that can be gained from the Sevenoaks school-based youth work experience. In the first place, it is critical to the success of this school-based youth work that **the school has formal and supportive advocacy and welfare procedures within which the youth workers have clearly defined roles.**

Dr Kath Partridge describes the whole-school context:

"Our youth workers are really important members of our leadership team. We have 150-200 students who are 'at risk' in some way, out of a population of 500. We have a wonderful advocacy model: every child in the school has an advocate, who then comes to me, the Vice Principal, Brooke or Sharon, saying: 'This kid needs to see someone immediately'. Sometimes the problems are very urgent: 'I'm living on the street; I haven't eaten in days; I got abused last night'. For the first time ever, we're actually feeding real hungry kids. Teachers work very much within that circle: the issues are discussed, taken to the student's advocate, passed on to Brooke and to the Principal if it's a serious issue, or requiring mandatory reporting. Some staff would refer the child to the Vice Principal or myself, to refer on: others refer directly to Brooke. The youth workers are just a part of the family. It's crucial that you choose youth workers who really know what the culture, values and vision of the school are."

Brooke describes the way this advocacy and referral process happens:

"All students are organised into cross-aged groups and they have timetabled sessions together, with 5 to 15 students per teacher (the number depends on the perceived support needs of the young people). So I have a procedure to follow from the student to the advocate, who gets feedback from other teachers. It can work the other way: the advocate speaks to the Principal about a concern, she speaks to me and then I respond and work with the advocate. That teacher advocate system helps to tie a good welfare process in better."

This process of embedding the youth workers in the school's welfare approach is maintained through staff induction and training. Kath describes the start of each year where: *"for new staff – as part of the induction – Brooke and Sharon talk about their role: how and when new staff might need to access them."*

Sharon also talks about their on-going education role with staff:

"We run workshops for teachers explaining our role: why we do what we do, why we do things differently. We give them case studies and ask how they would handle it and explain our method. We also support teachers; they come to us with problems they're facing, and we offer strategies they can try out. Like a student that wouldn't stay in the classroom: I suggested letting him sit outside, and he finished his education at a table outside the class. Kids not sitting still and concentrating 'cos they're hungry, so assisting by putting food in their belly so they can get on with it. Within the school, we do lots of education and publicity. If we've got an idea, we'll put it out there. We often send out generic emails: this is what we're doing, these are some generic situations coming to us, eg depression, and these are some strategies we're coming up with."

Additionally, the Principal sometimes involves the youth workers in managing cases of mandatory reporting. Brooke explains that: *"Reporting is mandatory in the education system but not in the state as such. My procedure is that I tell the student that I need to tell the Principal, and ask how they'd like me to communicate it. The Principal and I sometimes go to social workers at District Office and ensure that the way the school has handled it has been appropriate."*

As in most high schools around Australia, Sevenoaks is working with many young people who face substantial barriers to both learning and wellbeing. The school, from the Principal down, has a strong commitment to helping young people attain wellbeing and success beyond academic achievement. This holistic commitment to each young person assists an effective school-based youth work approach. The Principal notes:

"I work hard to meet the Education Department's requirements: the procedures and policy requirements. I know that I've got to do that as a Principal: work towards targets of attendance and graduation. However, I also know that what's most important to me is that if I can move a student along their social and emotional continuum and their learning continuum, which is part of them achieving their best, that's what matters to me. If

we've made an enormous difference in a child's life and they're a C or D student – that's fine. I try to have teaching staff focused on teaching and learning without managerial stuff infringing on what they do best. Some things I have to be on their back about: attendance records etc. But ultimately what we're striving for is knowing that, when a student leaves Sevenoaks, they're going to be a productive member of society, who has strong values about what a productive member of society should think and act like; that they are a well rounded, healthy, happy young person. "

Most young people interviewed at Sevenoaks were very enthusiastic about the way they are treated at the school, in particular because it is a senior secondary campus set up to be flexible and respectful of students as young adults. Tash, for example, contrasted behaviour at other schools:

" *I'd last a few months and then I'd be gone, suspended so much I'd get expelled. I'd fight; I was very abusive towards the teachers. But we get treated like adults here, as individuals, instead of a class or a people; get more respect. It's easier to work and go up to the teachers. You can sit there and talk to others; they seem to understand that we're older now.* "

Youth work fits comfortably within a school of this nature. An essential feature of the Sevenoaks education/youth work partnership is that the school **values youth work** and its unique contribution in working effectively with young people.

Dr Kath Partridge says that: *"the school has got to want to make the youth work important to the school's culture."* She adds:

" *It's a different set of skills to those educators bring. Finding the right person is crucial. It would be like losing my left arm to lose Sharon or Brooke. They're outstanding people – the work they do behind the scenes, the things they deal with. I couldn't just send it to a psychologist all the time. They get their hands dirty, and use a different skill set to a psychologist. Also, we only get a psychologist in one day a week. I see little point in having a youth worker on staff*

for one day a week: they need to become part of the everyday culture, known by kids, a familiar face, and somewhere with a nice office space with some privacy. "

It's apparent that these youth workers see the value in their own contribution in the school, and are confident in playing an active role in decision-making. Kath again notes: *"It's crucial that a youth worker employed in a school be able to talk to people in leadership positions in the school in an open dialogue, and able to work with the administration. I seek their advice and they seek mine on lots of stuff. We are role modelling a respectful relationship with each other. It's important to have youth workers who are mature enough to come and have an open dialogue with the Principal."*

Finally, these youth workers are able to act as a bridge between young people in need of assistance and local welfare agencies, because they **maintain strong and confident connections to local welfare agencies.**

Brooke describes these connections:

" *I keep regular contact with the agency. I'm not afraid to ask, to let them know what my role is, and to let them know what I can offer them. I look at it from a micro and macro level: if we're all working in the same corridor [geographic area], we could be working with the same kids; it's important that we know each other and should be working as a team with that kid. It's a mutual relationship because they can help our students access the services they need, and I can help them access the clients they need.*

It keeps numbers up for many local welfare programs. A lot of agencies have to have certain numbers for a program to run. I contribute to that by referring kids to them. If I have a good relationship with that worker, it can be done quickly. I think it's just a much more time-effective method because that agency doesn't have to advocate their service a lot, because I already know about it. I always ask the young people – at the end of the day it's up to them; I use my knowledge and judgement but it's always up to the young people. "

Kath agrees:

"Our ability to access community organisations is enhanced by the youth workers within the school. They have extraordinary networks, and act as conduits. Those organisations know what programs they could offer to help us, through their dialogue with our youth workers. We're sharing information with organisations; people are happy to know what issues we've got going on. For example, Brooke and Sharon went out and said: 'We need a program for young mums', and the City of Canning agreed that it was a great idea, and we developed that program in partnership with them. "

She sums up by reflecting on the particular value that this partnership brings to the College:

"Our school absolutely does benefit on a daily basis from having youth workers on staff. There would be issues that Sharon and Brooke deal with, which are keeping a child away from engaging in their traditional curriculum because they're so worried. They come here for a safe space, but the last thing they want to think about is their Maths or English. As soon as we can help with those issues, then they can start to get on with learning.

None of our staff members would think we've got every solution to every problem our kids face. All we want is our kids to be the best people they can be, and to achieve their potential. If we can sort out the problems kids have, then they can be better learners."

In Summary:

Since its inception in 2001, Sevenoaks Senior Secondary College, in Perth, has employed full-time youth workers as members of its staff. These youth workers are embedded within the school's welfare approach and are valued and respected by teaching and administrative staff, as well as by the large number of students they work with. They conduct generalist youth work through case-management, group programs and referrals – but have adapted this to a school context.

The lessons from the experience of Sevenoaks tell us that such an approach can be successful where:

» **The school has a formal and supportive advocacy and welfare procedure within which the youth workers have clearly defined roles;**
» **The school values youth work;** and
» **The youth workers maintain strong and confident relationships with local welfare agencies.**

LOCATING YOUTH WORKERS IN SCHOOLS
Shellharbour Youth Services Program, Illawarra

TOLD THROUGH THE VOICES OF: **MEGAN LEE** AND **MICHAEL JONES**
WITH COMMENTS FROM: **JOHN HAMBLY, BOB PASTOR, PATRICK BURKE** AND **FIVE YEAR 11 STUDENTS AT WARILLA HIGH SCHOOL**

A partnership between schools and local government locates youth workers in schools in Shellharbour City (in the Illawarra Region of New South Wales, about 100 kilometres south of Sydney). The youth workers are employed by the City Council but the nature of their work is directed by the welfare policies and needs of the schools.

Each of the youth workers employed by the Shellharbour City Council Youth Service works within one of four local High Schools for four hours per week. In most settings, their work is predominantly counselling, case-management and conducting group discussions, with a small number of students, in particular linking young people with outside welfare agencies. In addition, the youth workers conduct group programs, present health classes and take students out to forums, events and courses in the community.

Michael Jones, one of the youth workers, says: *"We cater more to sub groups who aren't getting opportunity. At Lake Illawarra High, I tend to end up with young people who are socially isolated and therefore at risk of leaving school early."* Therefore, Michael says, the program's goal is to *"provide access to youth services, particularly for those young people who would not normally access youth*

services", but it is also to *"provide access to and resources for the community sector for both students and teachers."*

Megan Lee is another youth worker with the program. *"Our goal is meeting young people where they're at – both literally and metaphorically,"* she says.

History
This youth workers in schools program began as a pilot in Warilla High School in Term 3, 2004 and was jointly initiated by the school and the Shellharbour Youth Services Team. The school already engaged in a number of partnerships with community and welfare agencies, and identified the City Council Youth Service as the most appropriate agency to bring youth work into the school. It became a permanent program there in 2005 and expanded to three other high schools in 2006.

The Principal of Warilla High, John Hambly, notes: *"Both Warilla High and the Shellharbour City Council Youth Service were heading in the same direction philosophically. We adopt a teams-based approach, rather than a top down approach."*

The Partners
The program partnership involves four secondary schools: Warilla, Albion Park, Oak Flats and Lake Illawarra High Schools. This story draws principally on information about the partnership with Warilla High School.

Bob Pastor, Welfare Coordinator at Warilla High School, says:

> " *We take a student services approach. Parents are looking for schools that actively deal with and address bullying and that also provide full support to kids. That full welfare focus is just as important as other extra-curricular things that schools offer. We've started to arrange for the professionals our kids need to be coming here and be on campus.* "

The other partner is Shellharbour City Council Youth Services. This is based at a Youth Centre in the City centre, which provides general activities and support for young people aged between 12 and 25 years who live in the Shellharbour Local Government Area. The Youth Centre acts as a drop in centre to provide activities. Michael outlines the changes that happened in youth service provision when the school partnership developed:

Prior to 2004, when Megan went into Warilla, our budget for in-school programming was zero; last year it was 25% of our entire budget. This program is working because we put the resources in. We have a budget commitment to the program. We've upped that commitment as needed. It's become our top priority within what we do.

Michael indicates that the Council's contribution to this work is justified explicitly in terms of reduction in other Council costs: *"There's been a real added bonus as a local government provider in terms of community safety issues. We're youth workers – but we also have a commitment to local government."*

Strategies

The Shellharbour City Council Youth Service makes use of four main strategies in their work in schools.

The first strategy, in which **members of the Youth Services team are allocated to work each week within a local high school,** is fairly straightforward. Rather than conduct youth work at the Youth Centre or on the streets, the venue for this work is within a school. The Youth Service's clients are the students of the school, organised through the school's own processes.

Patrick Burke, a youth worker with Shellharbour Youth Service, explains how this works:

" *A few days beforehand, I ring the school and speak to the Head of Welfare or to the Principal to inquire about what kids I need to see and whether there are any particular issues: a broad background so I'm not going in cold.*

I sign in, have a visitor's and staff member's badge. Usually staff leave me notes if they need to get hold of me. I swing past the Assistant Principal and Principal's office to see what's going on. At school assembly, the teachers call out who'll be seeing me in which periods, but that's not set in concrete. I take some cases that are more urgent. I have a tiny office where kids leave notes under the door, because I also run the Youth Centres in that area. Kids also leave notes about following up TAFE applications etc.

The bell goes and I start seeing kids, prioritise things straight away. Usually it's half to one period each. I'm there five periods, which makes it ten kids I can see out of eight hundred. I'll follow it up a week or two later. At lunch break I go to the welfare meeting, where we discuss upcoming events, and planning. "

Michael explains that conducting youth work within schools is part of a broader outreach strategy by Youth Services: *"We have youth workers on the streets Friday and Saturday nights in Warilla and youth workers at the shopping centre on Thursday night where the majority of kids from Warilla congregate."*

Whilst in the schools, youth workers secondly **provide group programs, offer health education, and undertake counselling** as requested by the schools. Michael explains this group work:

" *I've been invited in to do group work with young women with self-esteem issues. I do some group and team work with Year 11s in a Crossroads program on young people and safety. We have a trust and support element – friends are young people's main support base. So we conduct our work based on the idea that they tend to access their friends before they access us. We take them through experiential learning around*

trust, support and decision-making."

Thirdly, while they are in schools, some of the youth workers put effort into **training and resourcing teachers**. Michael says:

"I only spend half my time there with kids; the rest is building relationships and resourcing teachers. Some teachers don't need you to take on a student who has approached them, just to resource them. One of the best things we ever did was taking our local Youth Service Guide in and giving it to teachers; they were so appreciative and we'd never thought to do it. We're also up-skilling the teachers so they'll be more equipped to provide support to young people. "

Finally, the Youth Service also runs a number of **Youth Forums and Youth Programs** each year, to which schools are required to send young people. This is part of the agreement made with each school that is receiving a youth worker for 'free'. Michael explains how this links to students' knowledge of services:

"With our Transition to Teens program last year, we accessed 13 of the 14 local government primary schools; that's been going for two years. If in four years' time that's still going, every young person in a public high school will know a youth worker, and will have spent at least one full day with a youth worker. That dramatically raises awareness for when they need us."

Outcomes for young people

Youth work within schools is well placed to gain access to school-aged young people within a setting that they are obliged to attend for 30 or more hours a week. It is also well placed to make use of teachers' and schools' regular interaction with all these young people – not just those already accessing welfare services. This can facilitate **early identification of issues**.

Michael says that the partnership has provided Youth Services with *"early identification of young people at risk, both of some type of harm (physical, emotional etc) and particularly those at risk of leaving school early. They're so easy to spot in school: you can pick it on the first day – they stick out in the school environment."*

Megan adds:

"The most effective thing about this partnership is just how quickly we manage to ID what that young person's needs are and to start to act on it. A lot of my students – those who present at a crisis point – are referred by the welfare coordinator, either because their parents have called him, or they have been flagged for being expelled. Definitely those are at risk, where action needs to be taken or an urgent health referral made: drug and alcohol referrals and family counselling. "

In addition to providing assistance and referrals to young people, the youth workers are able to **improve the access of young people to youth services out of school**. They ensure that young people are aware of where to go and how to seek help when they do need it, or alternatively are aware of how to connect to community development activities.

Five Year 11 girls discussed how their ideas about local youth services had changed from working with Megan at the school. One said: *"If she wasn't here, I wouldn't know there was a Youth Centre and someone you can talk to. I wouldn't know there was a counsellor even."* Another two agreed: *"I knew it was there but didn't know it was for me. I wanted to be invisible, keep to myself"*; and *"People often just drive past and avoid it because they don't think it's a cool place to hang – just for troubled kids."* Their perceptions had changed: *"Now I think it's for anyone who wants to get involved in the community, or find out what their rights are in the community. You don't need to have problems to go to the Youth Centre. You can start programs, get involved, make new friends."* They pointed out: *"People aren't educated about what goes on at Youth Centres. It's only because we know Megan that we know that you don't have to have a problem to go there."* That information also leads to involvement: *"It's like we're involved in the community more; now that Megan's here, kids know what's on after school, all the activities; it's just better."*

This youth work approach in schools can bridge the gap between young people and the community services that are designed to meet their needs, as young people are made aware of and introduced to agencies, programs and welfare workers. Michael says:

"Young people get what they want: their choices increase after coming into contact with us; they feel a part of something that's a bit bigger; they experience connectivity. Young people we connect with on the street often feel like a part of the problem, not the community. We've turned that around a bit with our outreach work: they feel connected; they are part of something."

The programs run by the Council Youth Service are able to adapt to school-identified needs, and to connect programs to the most interested or in-need young people. *"The benefit for us is that we've got access to student populations now,"* says Michael.

"The programs that we run at the Youth Centres are far more successful at attracting the target groups we want them to attract. Schools are very good at identifying young people with issues; they know them better in a generalist way because they spend so much time with them. The respect we're building will come back in the other way."

What Works in this Partnership?

The first learning from this youth work in schools partnership is that this model of youth work in schools has succeeded due to the Youth Service developing the relationship in **a conciliatory manner over time**.

Michael says that: *"it's a natural part of the relationship that, to begin with, we're the ones who are compromising and who push it"*. He goes on to note the need for patience:

"The first thing that welfare workers need to acknowledge when they move into a school is that we're not on our turf: it's their culture, which is very different to the welfare sector. As in all partnerships, you've got to build your credibility by making promises and keeping them, by being respectful that you're not playing on your own ground. It's not your Youth Centre – it's their school. It may take ten years, but that's cool. Youth work within schools is not for sprinters; it's for stayers."

Megan suggests that a youth worker in schools has to have special attributes:

"It's important for a youth worker going into a school to have good communication skills, being really open and honest with the welfare teacher: to go slow, make sure everything is on the table, and that there are no hidden agendas. I really lent on the Welfare Coordinator for guidance, checked everything by him to begin with, to make sure I was running it how he wanted – not to cross any boundaries – talking to other teachers to check if they knew who I was."

Through their experience of working in schools, these youth workers have become more sympathetic and less judgemental of the decisions made by schools, including learning to develop programs with an awareness of the tight timetable of the school year. Megan acknowledges:

"Often youth workers who sit outside of the education system have a particular view and misunderstanding of how things occur on the coal face. I'm now far more empathetic towards schools than I was before, when I would have blamed schools for things, and assumed that the school did something inappropriate without looking into it."

Michael adds:

"Last year we had an evaluation when we brought the Principals in, discussed expectations, how things were going, what schools would like to see improved, and what obstacles they'd faced. A couple of good things came out: getting timing right for programs, and being mindful of the school year. It was good for us 'cos we went in so enthusiastic but not aware of everything you have to work around in a school year. It improved our systems of working within the school environment.

Our time frames have to be longer. It takes a bit longer, and you've got to give it time; teachers are busy, it's hard to catch up. Schools need lots of notice, and some justification, and it helps if you can hook it into the curriculum, which is actually pretty easy to do."

This program demonstrates the success of **providing a distinctly different service** to young people, which the school can't provide. Michael explains:

"*You need to be mindful that teachers are educators, not welfare workers, so you can't expect them to have the depth of empathy or understanding of welfare issues. They have an important and difficult job that they need to focus on; they don't have to be the welfare expert, because we can be. We can deal with the young person's issues out of school, whereas even school-based welfare teams have an internal focus. We're able to provide knowledge and access to services and programs that exist outside of school hours. We bring a broad and in-depth knowledge of local services into the schools.*"

From his role as Welfare Coordinator, Bob Pastor agrees: *"Because of her youth training, Megan brings a completely different protocol and way of doing business than I would as an educator. When the kids spin out and need support during class time and I'm busy, it's so much better if I can send them to Megan."*

The five year 11 girls discuss how talking to a youth worker was different to talking to teachers. They say:

» Teachers hold grudges.
» They do favouritism.
» Teachers hold authority over you.
» If you're not getting on with a teacher, they don't care and won't help you or give you the time 'cos you'd already burnt your bridge with them.
» With teachers, they're more like your parents: they're stricter, more controlling, more on your back about getting your work done.
» They write reports on you: you feel like they might judge you more.
» They might take pity on you and treat you differently to the other kids.
» And you think teachers won't have experienced any of this stuff.
» You feel more comfortable and more relaxed; you feel like you can trust the person – it's not as uptight or formal.
» Teachers have to tell other people outside school where, with a youth worker, it's more confidential.

» So with teachers there isn't as much trust, like they might tell other teachers and then everyone knows; you feel like your teachers gossip.

They also say that talking to a youth worker is different to talking to a counsellor:

» A counsellor is more prone to just fix one area, to help you with that. You talk about one area, break it down into different areas and focus on ways to fix that. With a youth worker, it's more comfortable and relaxed; more prone to ask you about everything, more like your friends. They don't just ask you about your problems.
» You know your counsellor has a list of things and is trying to figure out what's best.
» They've got a file on you, like they're testing you, experimenting on you, putting you on trial – assessing you.
» When you see a counsellor, it's more formal; you have an appointment with an amount of time.
» Both have helped me a lot: my counsellor has become like a friend – it's a positive having both, getting two different sides. It's easier to have people to talk to who I can trust and know what's happened.

This leads them to like talking to a youth worker because:

» The friendly, relaxed environment.
» You know with a youth worker that they've seen other people with the same problems.
» It's a more relaxed environment; you build up a friendship and you feel like you can trust them all.
» Plenty of information.
» You feel like you can tell a youth worker anything at all.
» You need to know there are people in the community who can help who aren't teachers.
» 'Cos she's younger, how she's dressed.
» Total confidentiality.
» It's good to let kids know that it's not going to be spread, and she'll tell you first before she tells other people – you really need that warning.

The program's credibility within schools developed as the Youth Service demonstrated what it had to offer. Michael suggests how to start such an approach:

" I would start by holding meetings in the school; take some of what you're doing in and let them see you first. Initially get in there for something that's already established such as a network meeting. When you come to the table, take something that's going to benefit them. We had a really good result with a program run by the local adolescent health unit. We brought some kids from the school to 'Bold Beautiful Babes'. The result was great; the school was so impressed. The students obviously started to behave better because they felt better and became more connected to the community – and so the school saw us as an asset, which was the best way to be viewed. "

Therefore the schools and the Youth Service maintain their commitment to this partnership because they are each experiencing **obvious benefits**. All the partners, in their shared commitment to positive outcomes for young people, acknowledge that the partnership is enhancing these outcomes. Megan notes:

" This partnership works because both partners have something massive to gain. Youth Services and the Department of Education are basically working for the same goal: the welfare of the student. We have a different perspective to the school, but it's ensuring the young person gets up every morning and is happy about where they're going. "

There are benefits from the partnership for the schools; John Hambly, the Principal identifies some of these:

" The success of this program is the number of kids wanting to come here. We have, on average, 60 out-of-area applications. We also have families moving into the area – the 'house full' sign is up at 1200 students – because of the success of our student support program; because we have an unwavering commitment that any kid walking through the school gates has the possibility for success. "

Michael points to: *"improved statistics of education, employment and training outcomes for kids from Warilla*

High, which is partly attributed to our work. We know the partnership is successful because the program continues; the schools wouldn't have us back if it weren't." And Megan adds: *"The schools see positive outcomes from our work: young people who are happier and focused within the school system, not disturbing class, curbing antisocial or depressed behaviour, easier to manage, more appropriate behaviour for the school environment."*

There are also benefits for the Shellharbour City Council Youth Service from the partnership. Michael reminds us that: *"We wanted to go into schools in the first place because we acknowledged that we have an issue about Youth Services not accessing the mainstream – who are the majority, and we should be accessing them or them us. This is particularly so since, within that mainstream, there are a whole bunch of [students with] issues who will remain hidden if they're not given the opportunity to gain access to us on their terms, not ours. If we were a business and we weren't in schools, we'd be bankrupt: there simply aren't enough kids walking through the door of our Youth Centre."*

He then contrasts current outcomes for the Youth Services:

" Through our work in the schools, we have access to a majority percentage of the young people in our target group. Through the relationship with the school, we've had really good outcomes in terms of accessing young people and being accessible to young people within our target groups. We tend to have a longer relationship after the initial contact even if it's not case-management or programming, because you run into them at school, on the street, or at the square. If two of us go to the square, we'll be swamped the whole time, being approached by young people to say hi, because we know them all from school. Before the school program, we had to approach them. "

Patrick also notes that: *"All of the school work and other outreach work is really useful: it breaks down barriers if the kids see us at school, at the shopping centre or Youth Centre – there are loads of places they can find us. If you were a youth worker just at the school I don't think it would work. It helps quite exceptionally because I got to know a lot of*

kids that come to the Youth Centre and the school.”

“We know this program is successful,” Michael sums up, *“because our other programs are growing because of contacts made through schools. We have a relationship with more young people in our city.”*

There's a difference, he says, between *“a centre-based service and a service based in a centre.”* The nature of youth work has changed:

"*When we opened up the Centre nine years ago, there were lots more kids coming in. Initially young people were starved for entertainment and for safe and secure places to socialise. Youth Centres provided that. A decade later, young people aren't necessarily engaging in those same activities. There's greater access to technology and therefore less need to come to the Youth Centre for those standard recreational activities, which gave us opportunity to develop a relationship and let them know we're here for when they might need us later.*

With our outreach, we've got that access back and ten fold; every public high school aged young person in the LGA has access to a youth worker and knows about it."

In Summary:

Each of the youth workers employed by the Shellharbour City Council Youth Service works within one of four local High Schools for four hours per week. The youth workers are employed by the City Council but schools direct the nature of the youth work they conduct. In most settings, their work is predominantly counselling or case-management, and conducting group discussions, with a small number of students, in particular linking young people with outside welfare agencies. In addition, the youth workers conduct group programs, present health classes and take students out to forums, events and courses in the community.

The lessons from the experience from Shellharbour tell us that such an approach can be successful where:

» The Youth Service develops the relationship in **a conciliatory manner over time**;
» The partnership provides **a distinctly different service to young people** to that which the school can provide; and
» There are **obvious benefits for all partners**.

Section D:
Partnering with Young People

Building Stories in Our Young People
The Yiriman Project

THROUGH THE VOICES OF: **ANTHONY WATSON, MERVYN MULARDY JNR (MULAT), MICHELLE COLES** AND **HUGH WALLACE SMITH**
WITH COMMENTS FROM: **SYLVIE SHOVELLER, ELAINE MCMAHON, LENNY HOPIGA, ISHMAEL CROFT, CLAUDE CARTER, ANNETTE KOGOLO, WILLIAM WATSON, LEELA WATSON, JOHNENE WATSON** AND **DARRELL COMBS**

Please note: All participants are referred to by their European names. Traditional names are highly personal and not necessarily known to people outside the community.

Reader Warning: This publication contains images of Karajarri, Walmajarri, Nyikina and Mangala people. Caution should be exercised in reading, as some of these words and photos may be of deceased persons.

In the Nyikina and Mangala culture, the word **Yiriman** refers to a culturally significant place, with recent historical conflict. It's all about providing generational background and identity by 'building stories in our young people'. The *Yiriman Project* works through cultural relationships to arrange travel on country with Elders and young people, which enables the passing on of traditional knowledge and healing through this experience.

Yiriman is a whole-of-community project addressing concerns about risk taking behaviour, high unemployment and loss of traditional culture amongst young people. People of all ages participate, contribute and benefit. Local definitions of 'youth' deliberately extend to young adults up to 30 years of age. Both young people who are living within self-governed communities, and those living in towns, are encouraged to participate. Each year, approximately 400 young adults (between 15 and 30 years) participate in *Yiriman* activities and this constitutes 70% of the young people within the communities.[1]

The Initiative

The *Yiriman Project* is a partnership between four Indigenous language groups within the western Kimberley, in the north-west of Western Australia,

who form a 'cultural block', tied together by shared stories, dreaming and family connections. It is also a partnership between these Indigenous communities and an Indigenous agency (the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre: KALACC), and a collaboration between generations within each community.

The communities working within the *Yiriman Project* are spread over a huge geographic area. Within this area, the participants live in towns and medium and small settlements. The **Karajarri** people have secured native title of coastal lands south of Broome, including the township Bidyadanga, 180 kilometres from Broome. **Walmajarri** people have also finalised an Indigenous Protected Area within the native title boundaries. This IPA is enabling multifaceted land management employment opportunities and industry partnerships for the young people of the region. *Yiriman* facilitates an introduction and a bridge here to possibilities for sustainable futures for young people and their families. Jarlmadangah is a vibrant community (two hours east of Broome) where **Nyikina** and **Mangala** people live and work. Their country lies around the Fitzroy River.

Each of the communities has access to few services. There are limited community and youth agencies operating in the area and very few recreational facilities for young people.

Forming the Partnerships

The idea for *Yiriman* came from discussions among the Elders of these communities about their concerns for young people and their worry that they weren't getting the chance to pass on their traditional knowledge. The concerns voiced by the Elders of the four language groups led them to develop ideas to address these concerns with some of their younger leaders.

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1   Yiriman Project statistics

Mervyn Mulardy Jnr is Co-chair of *Yiriman*, a Cultural Adviser for the Karajarri language group, chair for their prescribed body corporate and a musician. He outlines some of these concerns and how they responded:

> "*You've only got a handful of traditional people left. If they disappear, then we all finish. That's why old people from these four tribes said to us: 'We're a bit worried about our young people that they mightn't follow us. We're going to die one day and who will follow us?' So they asked us how can we do this, and we got concerned tribal groups together and talked about all the issues dealing with our younger people.*"

And the big agenda was culture: how can we preserve and look after culture? How can we get them to continue our culture? To look after their country and know, and get to have the knowledge of their country? How can we heal our young people, 'cos they're on drugs and alcohol? We need to.

Goals
The goals of *Yiriman* reflect the Elders' concerns. *Yiriman* aims to pass on traditional culture and to assist young people to reduce risk-taking and self-harm behaviours and to move into meaningful employment.

Mervyn Mulardy Jnr notes that *"the old people knew what direction they wanted the Project to go: the first, to try and teach our young people, also take our troublesome kids, those in trouble with the law, to take 'em out bush, teach 'em culture and spirituality and how to respect."*

Anthony Watson, another co-chair of *Yiriman* and a Cultural Adviser with Nyikina-Mangala language group, adds:

> "*The Elders saw the next generation losing values and getting lost in society. The only thing they was good at was teaching them the cultural values to help them get off drugs and alcohol and get them back into a working healthy lifestyle....*
>
> *It's our lifestyle that we choose; we choose to have both worlds – cultural and mainstream. Since colonisation, our old people never had the chance*

of showing their true cultural values. So, for the kids growing up, seeing all these things of new lifestyles, they find it hard. Lot of them pick the wrong type of lifestyle... To pull the community back on track again – that's how Yiriman started."

There is optimism that the *Yiriman* project can also facilitate culturally appropriate and meaningful employment for young people. This goal is in the early stages of realisation.

Strategies:
The partnership has adopted four main strategies to achieve these goals:

The first and central strategy is taking young people on **trips to country with Elders.** The senior Elders meet together to make decisions about the location, activities and purpose of each trip to country. Young people self-nominate, or are nominated by their parents, by the community, by the young leaders or by youth workers, juvenile justice workers or, in some instances, the courts. The nature of each trip is determined according to traditional law: what is 'right way', what needs to be taught, and what it is appropriate to teach to the participants. The traditional owners of each part of country – usually one or two Elders from different family groups – are always participants who lead the planning and the journey.

The teaching role of Elders on trips to country is relatively informal. The young people 'walk behind' the Elders: they observe, ask questions and have a go. Bush skills, culture, language and the right ways of being in the world are all taught in an integrated approach. Sylvie Shoveller, a Karajarri Cultural Adviser describes one example:

> "*We went to a place called Salt Creek. We was telling stories, kids' stories. In the end, they had a corroborree. The kids were trying the dance. My uncle Johnny was showing them. The two old ladies, Winnie Gray and Rosie Munro, was telling the stories and Uncle Johnny too, showing them how to pluck a turkey and flushing them out. We took the kids out for a ride and showed them things. Take them away from trouble.*"

Mervyn Mulardy Jnr adds another example:

"*There was a trip we done at Munro Springs out in the Sandy Desert. We took our youths and old people out there, sit them down and talk to them about why they're here. They talked about how, if you look after it, you'll take over one day; showing them bush skills – plants and animals, tracks... Getting our young ones to know the stories; to get it in their mind so in future they can teach the ones below them, teach them how to respect those stories which have a lot of meaning.*"

Yiriman is for me a spiritual understanding and focus, getting them to know things about how old people used to experience things.

Secondly, *Yiriman* workers and cultural advisers **use digital technology and music as a tool to engage young people** on the trips to country. Each trip is filmed, photographs are taken and a story book is compiled. Cultural mapping is core essential work for *Yiriman*.

Elaine McMahon, a Karajarri Cultural Adviser and Elder explains: "*When they take them out bush, they get someone to video it and they show it back to the kids, and they get so excited, seeing themselves, remembering where they went – they keep singing out and screaming and kill themselves laughing.*"

Hugh Wallace Smith, the former men's project coordinator of *Yiriman* reflects on the reasons for this use of digital technology:

"*We really encourage the kids to develop these profiles of self, place and cultural context using art, music videos, photo-stories (a slide show with voice over) and photo-journals. They'll see themselves on the video and laugh; the next time they'll listen and think, and through repetition and empowerment, they see a bigger picture. There is a race to record culture through digital media, before it is lost, so it can be taught in new ways – not for commercial purposes or public consumption but for family groups themselves.*"

The third strategy involves **promoting young leaders** within each community who participate in *Yiriman*

decision-making, as designated 'young cultural bosses'. Promoting, supporting and training young leaders is a community focus. In addition to bringing their knowledge of young people and the issues they face, young cultural bosses (along with other capable young members of the community) are employed to do logistical support work for each trip to country. They also plan and facilitate some structured activities and sessions on each trip. The *Yiriman Project* provides many opportunities for young leaders to work, develop their skills, act as role-models and peer-mentors for younger members of their communities.

Johnene Watson is a young cultural leader for *Yiriman*, a Nyikina-Mangala Young Cultural Adviser and Jarlmadangah child care worker. She explains her role:

"*I'm lifting wood, driving cars, making tea, cooking, going to meetings, giving advice, doing shopping, sometimes making a list, planning and organising trips. For example, we took some kids from around Derby on a trip to Bidjidanga side. I was talking to some people I knew in Derby to find out where the kids were, who'd be good for the trip. Their family was asking me questions like how far to the place, like if I've been to the country already, how far from Broome, who's there and what family and if it's safe. On the camp I was motivating the kids to get up and get involved and stuff and we make a couple of speeches – me and another girl – about where we was from, what jobs we doing, telling all the kids what we do and getting them to talk.*"

"We resource and advocate for those young leaders to develop confidence," says Hugh Wallace Smith. "*In a sense they're campaigning for the relevance of these projects to their peers.*"

The community of Jarlmadangah, in particular, has brought up many young people who are committed to the survival and prosperity of Nyikina-Mangala culture and this small community. These are young women and men who are passionate about living a life which carries on traditional culture, alongside living a relatively western lifestyle. They reflect and strategise around holding other young people within their community, and encouraging town kids to come out and connect with country. There

are many opportunities for mentoring these young leaders by the KALACC workers through *Yiriman* and by other visiting professionals, specifically transference of the skills of youth and community development work, resource management, book-keeping, communications, and project management, as well as interactions with bureaucracy and funding bodies.

Over the six-year evolution of *Yiriman*, a young adult leadership group of approximately 30 young people has emerged in the region. These young leaders have independently designed and initiated many projects (ten so far in 2007) for which they use *Yiriman* as a resource. These projects develop each community's economic aspirations, improve young people's access to education and training, and set up commercial ventures that can employ young people. Therefore, **creating meaningful and culturally appropriate employment opportunities** is the fourth strategy that has been developed. Because of the community ownership of *Yiriman*, many of these independent projects are included in the discussions of *Yiriman*.

Anthony Watson notes that: *"The Yiriman Project provides dreams, lifestyle opportunities, work skills, life skills such as getting their drivers' licence, a key card, homemakers' programs, cooking classes. We have to provide work in community. If we don't, they go outside of community."* And Mervyn Mulardy Jnr gives some examples of employment that is:

> " *Developing skills in young people to try and see if they want to do coastal management like rehab on sand dunes, blocking off cultural sites where tourists can't go, putting up interpretive materials, using the Elders, working on facility construction, developing areas on the coast. We've got to develop this ranger program, for ourselves, not for anyone else, where they learn cultural skills, learn how to best communicate to people, to respect people.* "

The *Yiriman Project* works to strengthen culture, tradition and identity in young people. The project promotes the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges in structures that generate employment for young people.

These communities are now in the midst of a strong community strengthening process. *Yiriman* works

through multiple partnerships to build diverse and multifaceted project approaches. Trips to country allow space for, and invigorate whole of community imagining for the future. Michelle Coles, women's project co-ordinator for *Yiriman* describes the 'imagining of possibilities' that are enabled by being out in country:

> " *Everyone sits around the campfire talking: 'How many bush turkeys are out here? How many can be taken for food without numbers getting low? Who can research this with us?'*
>
> *They want to put a highway through a part of the desert where six language groups are responsible to the country. On country, young people are listening to the old people, discussing their concerns about the highway. Travelling along the proposed highway gives younger people a context: they learn more from Elders with each trip to the area and they come to understand how those Elders are weighing up the complexities of more general access to area that have huge significance and life-force for them. Leaders are making decisions to create sustainable livelihoods with least impact on important faith, traditions and laws.*
>
> *Young people are participating more at meetings with multiple agencies like native title groups, community leaders and government departments, considering impacts of tourists travelling, or establishing employment through development of ranger systems, developing ecological jobs.* "

Outcomes for Young People

There have already been major outcomes of the Project for young people.

Indigenous Australians traditionally believe that, through healing the land, we also heal ourselves. There is thus an interplay between land management and the **healing of young people as they walk on country and look after it** – they develop resilience and identity through self care and self belief. All the facilitators of *Yiriman* passionately describe the changes they witness when young people go on trips to country with Elders. Elaine McMahon, the Karajarri Cultural Adviser and Elder, describes these outcomes:

" *They feel like a real toughy when they're out there. When I go round the town, I see they're always walking with their head down. But when they're out bush, they look up and say: 'Oh, there's a lot more out there'. (Takes a big breath and raises her arms, looking up) They ask a lot of questions and their eyes are brighter. They go from one camp to others walk around and sit down talk to this mob here.* "

Annette Kogola, a Walmajarri Cultural Adviser, similarly observes:

" *Most of our young people have grown up in town and not much things they can see in and around town. Going out bush is beautiful and I suppose some of our young people find themselves when they're out there ... when they are finally out there, they see a lot of good things and I think they really get to know the country They feel so strong within themselves and feel that they belong to their country...* " 2

There are also significant health outcomes from the trips to country. Michelle Coles describes these as physical and spiritual:

" *The old people view this as a holistic approach about re-inscribing identity and building resilience. Trips promote exercise, food gathering, eating well, avoiding drugs and alcohol, practising positive recreational activities, spending intensive and valuable time with family, learning and teaching from each other in respectful ways.* "

The uniting of families and the nurturing of respect for Elders allows for greater family and community support for young people when they return from the trip. Hugh Wallace Smith sees families coming out of the trips much more united.

" *They've now got a lifetime of context: talking about where they went, what they did, seeing where their grandparents were. From seeing the families going out a bit scattered and disconnected, to seeing them come back so tight and connected, having reinforced cultural roles, identities and responsibilities.*

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2   *Yiriman* DVD, 2006

Respect is given to the Elders because they have the knowledge, the experience and cultural law; the young people have to listen and interpret and even, to an extent, to survive on country. "

Because it operates over a large geographic area, where several generations of people have been dispossessed of their land, the *Yiriman Project* is also healing that displacement. These practices are core expressions of Aboriginal identity and are fundamental to recovery and healing of the grief and trauma that people have experienced. Michelle Coles provides an example where a youth service approached *Yiriman*:

" *They said to us: 'This guy is drinking and using drugs in Derby town. How can we reconnect him through Yiriman?' We spoke to the old men (our senior Cultural Elders) saying: 'This is the boy's name. This is where he lives. This is his family. How can we work with him?' They told us his grandfather is from the desert and so they said: 'He can come with us out to this desert country.' He met family connections over that desert side. He learnt about others and about himself...*

There is immense value in young people finding those connections, exploring them and coming back with stories, and a mind that's filled with new awareness. It's reinstating kinship and familial relationships and that's significant. It's obvious and demonstrable: the displacement, fragmentation out of stolen generation stuff, is being mended or reconfigured. "

Through *Yiriman* trips, the second outcome is that **young people develop and assert culture, language and bush skills**. They become more self-sufficient, capable and proud of the complexity of their traditional cultures. Older people within these communities are adamant that young people must take over and carry on traditional culture, their faith, their belief systems and their laws – as their birth-right.

Yiriman provides a model for a parallel education system, in which traditional knowledge is taught in a culturally appropriate manner – whilst walking on country. Learning outcomes include intra-personal and inter-

personal skills, history, culture, religion, law, biology, geography, medicine, language and practical skills. A substantial portion of each language can only be taught contextually in this way, and is at risk of extinction without sustained language teaching on country.

Elaine McMahon says that *"when they grow up, they'll know what to do, how to get food, how to do fire. That is important for the kids. When they grow up, they can probably know that medicine and can pass it on. They got to know, else they'll be dumb all their lives."*

Lenny Hopiga, a Karajarri Cultural Adviser and stockman, describes ways in which culture and language are passed on:

" *They really like going out bush and to the sea. A lot of them bring spears too and it's good fun for them to spear the stingray or the shark, but then they eat it and that's good too. It's culture not to waste any. Some of them go bush that many times, they know what bush is all about... The ones who've come along a few times tell the others: 'Hey, this is how we do it.' We don't usually say much things in English, 'cos we never learnt those words in English, but we know in our language.* "

Claude Carter is a *Yiriman* Project Worker from the Walmajarri language group. He says:

" *You can get all kind of animal out there. You can support your family with them things. On top of that, you're teaching your kids that knowledge [so that] when they get married – they have a wife and kids and family – they go back to that country and get animal from there, and really look after their family* [3] "

Through such approaches, language and culture are being preserved, and young people are rising to the challenge of carrying this responsibility forward.

William Watson, Chairman of Jarlmadangah Burru explains:

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3   *Yiriman* DVD, 2006

" *They know where they come from, where is theirs, by going out and connecting with his grandfather, his uncle or whoever and them saying: 'You belong in that country – this is yours.' They've got something; it belongs to them. You see they walk livelier. Their steps smarten up. You see some of them – they radiate. Just from being in their country, their country is looking after them. It knows they've come back to where they belong.* "

Trips to country are the first stage of what these communities are trying to do. The final outcome for young people of the knowledge of country and culture, is that this is leading to the **generation of meaningful employment that values and maintains culture**. The *Yiriman Project* and these communities are constantly engaged in building natural resource management and cultural programs to achieve this outcome. *Yiriman* workers are able to help the young leaders within each community to pursue the skills and qualifications for sustainable employment options such as eco- and cultural-tourism, land and waterways management, aquaculture, bushfoods, soap making, essential oil production and rangering. In addition, fire management and quarantine monitoring, facilitated through *Yiriman*, have generated employment in recent years. The Jarlmadangah ranger project is nearing fruition and Darrell Combs, its Ranger Co-ordinator reports that: *"Ten to twelve of the rangers are half way through a TAFE program; also fence building training, biodiversity management training with AQIS (Australian Quarantine and Inspection Services) and water management. We're in an assessment process right now: getting drivers' licenses, rifle licenses etc."*

The Partnership

The *Yiriman Project* involves partnerships on three levels.

The **partnership between Indigenous communities, an Indigenous agency and government agencies** is organised through the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre (KALACC), which auspices the *Yiriman Project*. KALACC employs two full time, non-Indigenous staff to co-ordinate the *Yiriman Project*: Michelle Coles is the Women's Program Co-ordinator and Hugh

Wallace Smith was, until recently, the Men's Program Co-ordinator. Michelle and Hugh are responsible to the communities' cultural bosses in relation to programming and modelling of the service.

The **partnership between generations** (young people, a middle leadership generation and Elders) has both formal and informal elements. The *Yiriman* governance structure includes young peope who are in their 20s or 30s, as well as a middle generation and then senior cultural bosses. The young cultural advisers are mentored and trained to take on leadership roles within the partnership. They are skilled by *Yiriman* Elders to manage their roles and they become mentors on trips to country for other young adults. They are employed on the bush trips to work in a logistical and facilitating role. Senior cultural advisers direct practices for trips on country and establish appropriate cultural links for specific trips. Young cultural advisers follow protocols that are firmly entrenched and properly known to them. They liaise with traditional owners and travel identified routes, moving through country they have been told to travel, visiting only the water sources they are allowed, stopping at places with the right people and adhering to right customs, hunting only with the right people for certain country and respectfully following particular preparation. Everyone has a role, and those roles have been determined within their own strongly endorsed systems. Trips allow for these generational relationships and responsibilities to be asserted.

Thirdly, the **partnership between four language groups** is embedded in the formal decision-making structure of *Yiriman* (where each community has the same number of cultural bosses). Regular meetings are held where cultural bosses from each community come together to discuss and direct *Yiriman*. Kinship ties mean that there are also many less formal visits and contact between the communities (including on-line networking between the younger cultural bosses). The *Yiriman* workers have equal responsibility to the three communities. Anthony Watson describes the value of this partnership:

"*Together we can pull in the funds. Our culture is community, not individual – and because they're close family, we want them to have the opportunity too. But it's a disadvantage too, 'cos we've got to share*

those funds around. Would be good, in the future, to each have our own funds. But to begin, you get greater voice with bigger numbers."

Funding

The *Yiriman Project*'s funding is managed by KALACC. This funding is received from FACSIA, the Federal Attorney General's Department, the AERF (Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation), the National Heritage Trust, the Department of Indigenous Affairs, the Office for Women and some from fees for service (providing trips to country for a neighbouring community).

Each community is also working with *Yiriman* and with the Kimberley Land Council to gain access to funding to support employment initiatives, particularly CDEP (Community Development Employment Projects) funding. Funding for the *Yiriman Project* acknowledges that it works across ten sectors: youth, family, community, mental health, allied health, community health, psycho-social rehabilitation, drug/alcohol, culture specific, and age specific.

What Works in the Yiriman Partnership?

Three specific learnings can be identified from the success of the *Yiriman* partnerships.

Young and old cultural bosses from each community talked firstly about the critical importance of **community ownership** in the success of the project, whilst acknowledging the logistical issues involved in ensuring that the communities are directing each decision.

The two full-time *Yiriman* workers are employed by KALACC, but are guided in cultural protocols and direction of programming by the young and old cultural bosses from the three communities. The cultural bosses love to joke about how much they have to tell Michelle (the women's worker) off, but it's clearly important that they can openly tell her when she's doing things 'wrong way' or when they feel cut out of the process.

Lenny Hopiga, for example, says that: "*Michelle got*

lots of bosses. When Michelle comes to visit us, to tell us what's going on, we can clear whatever wrong and right in culture – our culture and yours too. Clear talking, tell each other straight away when done something wrong." Elaine McMahon adds to this description of the community ownership of Michelle's work: *"Getting in touch with everyone trying to do things, says sorry when she can't do things. Sometimes we meet up and catch up what going on at other places then we come back and tell this mob that we've seen Michelle."*

Michelle Coles also acknowledges that: *"in my head, I have to talk to a whole lot of cultural bosses, and that takes time but it's unique."*

"It can go fast once people get used to making decisions," says Anthony Watson. *"Like Michelle's saying – before she can do things, she has to get approval. In some communities, she can get approval same day. For other issues, they have to think and talk about it to work out right way. It's control of destiny as well. Good practice to develop governance. People get frustrated and walk away when they don't have ownership of the process, but with this process we have ownership."*

It is acknowledged that correct process can slow decision-making. William Watson says: *"They might have to take some time to answer, asking questions like who's the person to see for that area, to go there for a bush trip, see the family and then find out the right person to talk to. And if they say yes, or hang on – we've got someone else you need to talk to."*

"It's really to sit down and listen to the community," adds Anthony Watson. *"And that's a starting point, to listen. You've got all the reports and a lot of problems in the community; you can go back to the community and give assistance, advice, bring to the table your expertise that you can provide, you can prioritise those activities into the project you want to do: which would be the main effective one for the community? A lot of people want to do everything at once. You need to pick out the major projects and complete them."*

Everyone involved in *Yiriman* is keen to see complete community management down the track. The partnership between Indigenous communities and

KALACC is viewed as most successful so long as it is short-term.

"Along the line," says Anthony Watson, *"we'll do those jobs ourselves – when the workers get trained up in each area: how to do those programs; not so much the bush trip, but mainly the paper work … reporting to funders, submission writing. We're training up young fellows in those areas – skills that can go into other jobs too."*

Self-sufficiency is also seen as a practical issue. *"She mightn't be around,"* says Mervyn Mulardy Jnr, discussing Michelle's role. *"We might get our own mob working in the offices, someone we've trained up. End of the day we can do it ourselves. We've got people who are naturally skilled in it."* Michelle also tells the communities that: *"it's good for your young people to see you managing those projects yourselves."*

The communities themselves have developed the governance structure of the *Yiriman Project* in a manner that is considered to be the 'right way'. This facilitates the involvement of young and old people from each of the communities, but ultimately defers to the Elders who are mutually acknowledged to be the most senior. Michelle explains:

> "*With Yiriman there's a difference in the governance structure. They have allocated three senior men, three young men, three senior women, three young women from each of the three communities. They're never all present for decision making, but they will be completely aware of when decisions need to go further, to others or to a particular Elder as the ultimate decision-maker. There is a hierarchy that everyone intimately understands. Everyone will be part of the decision-making process, expressing their opinions, but the senior Elders' position will be taken and respected by all at the end of the day. Many NGO structures struggle because they use ways of being representative which don't reflect culturally-resonant decision-making practices.*"

Ishmael Croft, a Co-Chair of *Yiriman* and a KALACC Project Worker as well as a Walmajarri Young Cultural Adviser reminds us that: *"Even the past 200 or 300 years ago, the Elders always set direction. So when you go back onto country, it's the responsibility for Elders to set direction, and the*

people to own the project; then drive it themselves." [4]
The second lesson is the critical role within the *Yiriman Project* of the **middle generation** – those between Elders and the young generation. Protocols, roles and expectations in the inter-generational partnership seem to be an evolving practice, which respects traditional roles between younger and older members of community, whilst acknowledging the roles that the middle generation can play **as bridge, translator, mediator and role-model**.

Leela Watson is a Nyikina-Mangala Young Cultural Adviser and the Jarlmadangah Telecentre Manager. She says that: *"There's always a middle person. In our case it's us middle ones, the ones that are older than the young ones. We know what we're doing. Sometimes we're correcting the old people if they get ahead of themselves or forget something. There is always someone who guides or runs those activities."* She goes on to describe her role as 'translator':

> "*Some of the young people don't always understand what the older people say, so one of us is saying: 'Oh hey, she's saying this.' It's not always serious. We always get a laugh out of everything... Sometimes when the old people talk to young kids, they take offence really quickly, so we'd always explain what we thought the old people were saying and then they'll correct us. Going around in circles really when we're translating between the two.*"

Anthony Watson argues that communities should listen to the young people too. *"They have that experience [across both worlds]. That's our safety net: bringing accounting, managing, our discussions, talking to Elders. You guys need us to keep an eye on what's going on. I like them to retire and do what they're good at: bush programs – and leave us to do admin and governance. We know what to look at and how to make it happen – what they want."*

Thirdly, commitment is generated from participants because **all partners are experiencing benefits** from the *Yiriman* partnerships.

There are benefits for KALACC. Through *Yiriman*, KALACC us able to engage in and work to achieve their

organisational mission: *To assist and promote the ceremonies, songs and dance of Kimberley Aboriginal people, to encourage and strengthen their social, cultural and legal values and ensure their traditions a place in Australian society.* Indigenous staff are supported and, in turn, provide a wealth of knowledge and skills that sustain appropriate practices, and maintain strong and healthy relationships with community. They are the voice to and from the Elders, who constitute the governance structure for KALACC.

There are benefits for the communities. At a practical level, the communities working in partnership with KALACC on this project appreciate that the non-Indigenous workers contribute by imparting their skills, sharing them and working with Indigenous leaders to ensure they can resource the project and the communities successfully. The non-Indigenous staff rely on their cultural advisers and Aboriginal staff to be their guides and mentors. The relationships are two-way and absolutely important. Claude Carter describes how the communities benefit: *"The Yiriman mob, they got the funding; like vehicle wise, we've got nothing. The Yiriman is really good like that, really organised; they got everything for these trips."* [5]

There are benefits for Elders and for young people. "It sort of works both ways," says William Watson.

> "*The old people, if they don't show them, they sit and stew, thinking: 'Oh, if I never saw this person or told him where he's come from, or showed him where his parents or grandparents come from.' They feel hurt, like there's nothing inside, that they haven't given anything back to this person that is rightfully theirs.*
>
> *The young people see that the old person's happy to show them the country, so he's happy too. It's been cut away from him; he knows where he is, he's back in his home.*
>
> *When they come back from country, they communicate with the old people a lot better. Before they were just doing all the town stuff and leaving the old people back home. Doing all them things, finding themselves; they come back and can sit*

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4 *Yiriman* DVD, 2006

5 *Yiriman* DVD, 2006

down face to face and have a good yarn, a decent conversation with them, not only where they been, but just life in general, in a round about way – opening up to them a lot better. In the past they just zoomed past them, and zoomed into town; now they spend a bit of time with them. They sort of settle down a bit; makes them a bit aware of how fast they been living their life – pulls them back."

In addition, **there are many benefits for the middle generation of young leaders** in *Yiriman*. Young women within these communities are becoming leaders, for example, supported by both community and the women's program worker with *Yiriman*. Johnene Watson provides further examples of the development of confidence:

> "*On the weekend we were meeting in Bidjidanga with Davina, my other niece. She surprised me: got up and started talking and arguing the point. Davina reckoned she picked up her confidence from the Darwin [youth leadership] conference. I'm watching my dad, my brothers, cousins – not much ladies getting up and talking – only now I see them, now.* (Question: Would it be OK if there were more women's voices?) '*Yeah!* (cheeky click) – *would be deadly.*'"

Leela Watson describes her own experience of developing skills and confidence:

> "*We've always been not so keen on being able to talk to a lot of people in public, to stand up in front of a lot of people and present what we do with Yiriman. I've had to do that when I went down and talked about Yiriman in front of 200 people and that was scary. I think you could hear the box rattling. I know the girls overcame that with this Yiriman leadership stuff – more confident, I reckon.*"

Finally, **there are benefits for the communities from working together**. The language groups that comprise *Yiriman* support each other and share good practice both in and beyond the *Yiriman Project*. They are at varied stages of experimenting with solutions to many of the same problems. The successes of the *Yiriman Project* are acknowledged at many levels, giving the young cultural bosses and the KALACC workers leverage to lobby for funding and partnerships that will support their goals of establishing self-sufficient, self-governed enterprises. *"One thing about each community and tribal groups,"* says Mervyn Mulardy Jnr, *"we're all learning off each other with our youth projects; we share ideas."*

Hugh Wallace Smith describes this as almost like a friendly competition. *"They'll compete with their peers and are very proud about what they've done: co-ordinating a program, getting on TV, making a movie. There is a lot of cultural peer competition. It's a very healthy style of motivating people and rewarding for them because they're really part of the ownership of it."*

In Summary:

In the Nyikina and Mangala culture, the word **Yiriman** refers to a culturally significant place, with recent historical conflict. It's all about providing generational background and identity for 'building stories in our young people'. The *Yiriman Project* works through cultural relationships to arrange travel on country with Elders and young people, which enables the passing on of traditional knowledge and healing through this experience. The *Yiriman Project* is a partnership between four language groups, between these Indigenous communities and an Indigenous agency (the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre: KALACC), and a collaboration between generations within each community.

The program is described as a 'cultural youth program':

It's a program that was developed by the Elders and communities, over four language groups. It's a project that engages kids in communities, age groups between 10 and 30, in land management, community development and youth leadership programs. It's a project that looks at building cultural identity into its young people, reinforcing the strength and cultural knowledge which young people often lack, often due to the influence of western culture, town life, and drink and drugs, and those short term distractions. Yiriman is

about creating opportunity in the community whether it be ranger projects, sustainable land management, cultural tourism, preventative bush medicine projects. It's one of a variety of projects.

The reason why it works is that the Elders and communities want to do these programs. We've got the flexibility under the Yiriman project to develop programs that communities want.

Our bosses are the cultural Elders, the law and culture bosses. We work directly under them. Some communities don't have the opportunity to get out to country at all and we're providing that opportunity. Through that opportunity, a lot of young strong leaders are coming out of communities with a sense of identity and purpose and that's what this project is all about. *

» The lessons from the **Yiriman Project** tell us the partnership was successful because it used **culturally resonant and contextual approaches**, based on:
» **community ownership**;
» **a middle generation acting as bridges and role models**; and
» **positive outcomes that were felt by all partners**.

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*   Hugh Wallace Smith, Yiriman DVD, 2006

The Mount Gambier Youth Advisory Council

THROUGH THE VOICES OF: **GINA PLOENGES, DANIEL MCDONOUGH** AND **TERASA NEARMY**
WITH COMMENTS FROM: **SAMUEL, TOM, KATYA** AND **CHRIS** [1]

"We have a real haemorrhage of young people to Adelaide and Melbourne when they finish school," says Daniel McDonough, a member of the Mount Gambier City Council. *"A large proportion leaves to go to tertiary study or into the workforce."* Mount Gambier is the regional centre for South East South Australia and the Western Districts of Victoria. Despite its diverse and stable economic base, there's an age gap of 16 to 28 year olds in town.

Mount Gambier's Youth Advisory Council (YAC) is a group of 12 to 25 year olds, that aims to address both young people's needs, and also the needs for a balanced and dynamic community. Daniel is 23 years old, and is the Councils's delegate to the YAC. He explains why retaining young people in Mount Gambier and meeting their needs is important for the community:

> *Young people have different ideas of what current cultures are. Popular ideas, theatre, and the arts are often shaped by that demographic. The more young people who leave, the less demand there*

will be for what's desired by that age group in the town, so there's a flow-on effect to pubs, nightclubs, restaurants, and cafes. The biggest spenders on retail, hospitality and tourism are 18-35 years olds, so if they're not here, then demand is lessened. Every facet of society will equally suffer if you take any chunk out.

The Mount Gambier Youth Advisory Council was established as part of a state-wide initiative; there are 58 Councils in South Australia with a Youth Advisory Council. Gina Ploenges is the Council's Community Services Manager and the YAC facilitator. She explains that the Mount Gambier YAC is in its fifth year, and that it differs from the model used in many other areas:

> *The Council had previous experience of having youth-type Councils and they had failed, but then the State offered each of the Councils $3000 to have a Youth Advisory Council. We came up with a completely project-based model. Young people could come and go as they wanted, and only engage in the*

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1   Not their real names

events they were interested in. We wouldn't have elected office bearers because then that created a hierarchy and this was to be completely democratic [with] everyone as important as each other around the table. We've never had a chairperson; we elect them at each meeting. "

The Office for Youth weren't sold on it. They wanted us all to have pseudo-make-believe Councils, but they were brave enough and gave us the money and we've proved them completely and utterly wrong.

Goals

In its Code of Conduct, the Mount Gambier Youth Advisory Council sets out its aims:

» To provide recommendations and advice to Council (Local Government) on issues and decisions that affect or are relevant to local young people;

» To seek and represent the ideas and opinions of young people to provide a local 'youth voice' to Council;

» To increase communication and information exchange between young people and Council;

» To promote a positive image of young people; and

» To facilitate activities, events and forums as initiated by the YAC. [2]

Strategies

The Mount Gambier YAC uses five strategies to achieve these goals.

In line with its main goals, the first thing that the YAC does is to **provide advice to Council for Council policy and decision-making**. Daniel explains his role in that provision of advice: *"I'm a member of Council and I'm the Council's delegate to the YAC. We have a delegate on many committees. I hold the youth portfolio, and I'm a voluntary delegate to the YAC. I take anything that relates directly to Council decision-making back and forward between the YAC and the Council meeting."*

In one significant initiative, the YAC challenged the Mount Gambier Council about the absence of a strategic objective relating to youth when they were negotiating their next strategic plan. The YAC lobbied the Council, pointing out that a Youth Charter that had been developed by a recent forum (Youth=Change, organised by the YAC and the United Nations Youth Association) and that this should be included as a Council strategic objective. The following objectives, which relate directly to the Youth Charter, were subsequently adopted:

» Expand the brief of the Youth Advisory Council, by enhancing the relationship between the Youth Advisory Council and the Elected Members of Council, thereby ensuring young people are considered in all aspects of Council business and community development.

» Promote stories of success relating to young people. Provide an alternative to traditional media to portray

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2   City of Mount Gambier Youth Advisory Council Code of Conduct

young people in a positive light.

» Assist the Limestone Coast Division of General Practice in their endeavours to secure Headspace funding from the Federal Government. This funding to be focused on delivery of health services – mental and physical – to all young people in the community.

» Youth Advisory Council, in collaboration with Australian Red Cross, will deliver the Save a Mate (drug and alcohol harm minimisation education and party first aid) program to all interested high schools and youth advisory committees in the Limestone Coast Region.

» Youth Advisory Council to continue to seek funding to develop and deliver community arts programs for young people. In 2007, the Youth Advisory Council will collaborate with Ausmusic Industry to deliver workshops and create a showcase of local performance.

» Youth Advisory Council to continue to deliver education opportunities through its various networks to all young people in the community. The objective is to continue and expand the Its All Good program.

» Council to lobby State and Federal Government in collaboration with the regional Non-Government Organisations to ensure the creation of an accommodation/life education facility for young people who are homeless in the community.

» Ensure young people are consulted when developments are considered for public land/ community facilities in the Council area. This includes such developments as the new Public Library and the redevelopment of the Railway Lands. [3]

Terasa Nearmy is 22 years old, has been a YAC member for four years and is now its secretary as well as being a City Council Library employee. She describes this forum:

" **Youth=Change** was a very successful project organised by the YAC in partnership with UNYA – the United Nations Youth Association, who came down from Adelaide. It came up with a declaration at the end of the day, with sub-issues, that those young people want to see addressed, and events they want to see organised, like sex and respect or participation. "

"The YAC invited the Councillors for pizza," says Gina Ploenges, "and said to them: 'We agree with a lot in your

strategic plan, but you don't mention young people. Why aren't we in there?' Now it is part of the official document." The YAC and its facilitator have responsibility for implementing these eight youth-oriented objectives.

From the adult Council perspective, having the YAC available for liaison is invaluable. However this consultation is not the core experience or interest for most YAC members; they are involved and excited by the opportunity to organise music and other cultural events for young people in the community. So the second strategy is that the YAC **organises gigs, festivals, and other cultural events.** Gina provides some examples of this:

" *This year our YAC looked after the Mount Gambier Youth Week events. But we don't do events for the sake of doing an event; it has to be underpinned by some broader reason so it can engage the broader community. We had a stand at the show one year offering free MCing and hiphopping because the YAC kids wanted to respond positively to the fact that three young men had suicided in our community; they saw that young men weren't being heard in the community.* "

She points out that young people's control over events is central to their engagement:

" *Young people are very much interested in volunteering if it's something that they're interested in. I never have any trouble getting volunteers if they get to have control of an event for their peers, creating something from scratch, from designing everything – forms, programs – to whatever it is that needs to be done to make a successful event – recruiting bands, handing out fliers at the shopping centre...* "

Daniel adds that: "Young people are more likely to take ownership of a YAC if there is involvement and a mix of long-term and short-term initiatives. There are things on the agenda that have an immediate response or effect... It's got to be a mix of results, communications and major events."

In addition, the YAC participates in **other fundraising and consultations.** For Tom, a 16 year old who recently joined

YAC, the important example is that: *"We helped out at the winter festival they had a while ago"* and Samuel, 15 years old and a YAC member for four years, says that: *"The best thing we've done was the Christmas pageant, raising money for disadvantaged kids. Helping other people besides doing stuff for myself."*

The adult facilitator takes an active gate-keeping role to avert the danger of overwhelming the YAC with local businesses and agencies seeking tokenistic consultation. Gina notes:

> " *They are a very valuable commodity in the community and everyone wants to consult with them, so I'm very protective of them. I'm the gate-keeper, and very cautious about what they have been consulted on. As long as there is something in it for them – I think that's important for real engagement.* "

Fourthly, the YAC has **regular meetings with a semi-formal structure**. Samuel describes the process: *"At meetings we all sit there and we choose a chairperson, then we go through what's on the agenda – like something from the last meeting, or something Gina brings up, look at correspondence – then we have pizzas."*

YAC meetings are held two or three times a month, though with special events, they will meet more often, sometimes in subgroups. Gina stresses the importance of regular processes:

> " *Usually three-quarters of the meeting would be talking about projects or programs coming up. We do official minutes, notes in dot points. The decisions either become projects or a decision to engage with Council to make sure the voice of young people is taken seriously.*
>
> *We do a lot of white board work such as mind mapping. Everyone has equal say: they're just yelling it out and I'm writing it. Then we take a photograph of the whiteboard and that becomes the plan – which is empowering, rather than one person taking minutes, which don't appear to be theirs because they've been channelled.*
> *The minutes also go to the CEO and the Mayor, so they are completely aware of what's going on. Cr*

Daniel McDonough might take these decisions back to Council or we've had some members who would just make an appointment with the Mayor... "

Finally, the YAC has **a part time adult facilitator who is employed by Council.** The members of the YAC discussed the balance between the facilitator's work and their own decision-making.

Chris, who is 17 years old and has been a YAC member for one year, says: *"It's mainly us, but she'll guide us and tells us what we can and can't do."* Samuel notes: *"She'll help us with the correspondence. Otherwise we do it. She'll help sometimes organising the events and things, but otherwise we get stuff done. She does all the applications for funding. She organises training days in media and stuff."*

Daniel adds that the facilitator *"does most of the secretarial work like agendas. She's a committed secretary to the group. But in doing things, we know that you're expected to be involved or it doesn't go ahead."*

Terasa sums up that *"It's very much controlled by young people: they're mainly talking. It's run and minuted by young people. Even though Gina's there giving guidance, she's very supportive of what comes out of our mouths... She helps us write our reports if we want to go for funding and she helps us do the annual report."*

In addition, she says that the facilitator brings her connections with the outside community. *"She'll also bring resources, texts and background research to the meeting. She has support for everything. And she's a mentor really for the young people in the committee."*

Daniel suggests that people initiating a partnership like this *"need passion and commitment."* But also, he says, the facilitator needs *"to have some authority, which brings about some of the respect. Gina works for the City Council, has been in the role a while, and has kids of her own; that all adds up to her having some authority, which the kids respect and trust. They've seen her around, with all these other kids who already respect her."*

Outcomes for Young People

The YAC has seen outcomes for young people in the following areas.

First, there has been specific **skill development** for the young people participating in the YAC. Samuel and Chris talk about getting *"contacts in Council"* and *"skills in how to run events, media, how to advertise, where to advertise and that. How to organise stages."* They also say this will help them in the future. *"If you have a job where you have to be on a Board, you'll know what to do,"* says Samuel and Chris adds: *"It gives you skills, and a bit more of an idea of how to get things done. You've already made mistakes – you can learn from them already rather than later on, when it's a big thing and it looks real bad."*

Gina points out that young people get different things out of the experience:

> *For a young mum on the YAC, it was a lifeline. Her son would come to all meetings and run around. It was the first time they'd had young parents with children; I said: 'If you're serious about funding us, this young person can't be excluded', so they brought in childcare. The young mum became a huge advocate for young people in the local community and, at the age of 16, was travelling all over the region running workshops...*
>
> *They also grow because they're seen in a different light in their own communities by being involved in the YAC. Terasa was part of a Regional Board for a drug and alcohol counselling services, as a result of being part of the YAC. They are all in their own way connecting, writing funding applications in areas they are interested in, going off to conferences, out there creating their own networks.*
>
> *They get access to opportunities they wouldn't normally get: Youth Parliament and other special programs, and access to networks they wouldn't normally get access to.*

Secondly, their involvement also provides **a sense of contribution within and to the community**. Chris points out that: *"You feel as if you help the community out more. They listen to you – everyone: teachers ask you about it, mates"* and Katya, 17 years old and a YAC member for two years, adds: *"You were just someone out in the world and now we're into it and it's like: 'I can speak now.'"*

Terasa enjoys *"organising the activities, getting them off the ground and then taking them to Council and saying: 'This is our idea, what do you think?' With the young people working together to create an event from nothing, the outcome is amazing – doing it together, and starting from nothing."*

"A lot of them are philanthropists at heart," says Gina. *"They get a sense of belonging to the bigger community."* She points out that the young people can get SACE points for being on the YAC, but that none of them have ever claimed it. *"I bring it up every year and ask them if they need me to sign off, but that's not their motivation for being here. Rather, they are publicly recognised for being active in the community."*

Involvement also gives young people a chance to explore community issues more deeply and understand them. *"They learn that you don't just go: 'Oh, we need a skate park', but need to think more deeply about the big picture for the community,"* explains Gina. *"When you're really part of a community and can look back and say: 'I was there; I helped to build that or make it happen', that's important to the intergenerational weaving of story in their own community."*

Daniel says that public involvement has changed everyone's perception of young people's roles within the community: *"You have an opportunity to do something in the greater community, to be recognised, to change stereotypes people have about youth being all at the mall breaking windows."*

Finally, it is recognised that **Council decisions now match better with young people's wants and needs.** Daniel points to the importance of the inclusion of the eight strategic goals relating to young people within the Council's strategic plan. *"It came from the community as well as from the YAC that youth was missing... It's a plan for 2050, when most Councillors will be people who are young now..."* he points out the benefits for the Council in having that consultative mechanism:

> *It's hard for Councillors to access those voices otherwise. Even just to survey two or three people – they do value that resource. Local government shouldn't be just retirees and business leaders; it should be accessible to all.*

The Partnership

This project can be understood as a partnership on two levels. First, it is a partnership between an elected Local Government Council and a Youth Council – one of a number of formal committees advising Council. Secondly, it can be understood as a Youth Partnership – a youth worker undertaking work in collaboration with young people.

The Council has a 30 year-old mayor, who was previously a member of the YAC and there is also a 25 year-old Councillor (Daniel McDonough) who attends YAC meetings. Daniel says:

> *We, as a Council, signed the State Government's Premier's Memorandum on Youth Participation, and this means a commitment to listening to the YAC. We definitely utilise the YAC as a research tool, and as communication with young people engaged in the community. From a Council's perspective, the main objective is a communication and engagement tool with and for young people.*

The Council funds both the YAC and the facilitator and also offers physical support in the form of buildings and meetings, food and drinks.

Gina explains that the South Australian Office for Youth provides $3000 per year for YACs, and that YACs are also able to apply for funding for Youth Week. There are also other possibilities, she says:

> *You can apply for diversity funding, which is to ensure that young people are not disadvantaged and can engage in YAC activities – such as access cabs for people with disabilities, providing buses or taxis where there is no transport, providing opportunities for new arrivals by developing cultural awareness training for existing YAC members.*
>
> *I apply for other funding like crime prevention funding through the State Attorney General's Department, the Red Cross Save a Mate and The Foundation for Young Australians' On-Track Leadership. We also approach local service clubs and local businesses ... a variety of sources. We tap into*

our local community a lot and, because we have such a good reputation, they like to be attached to the success of the City of Mount Gambier Youth Advisory Council.*

Daniel acknowledges that the facilitator's work contributes to funding for the position: *"The amount of funding that Gina is able to attract to the region for young people generally is huge. It funds part of Gina's position, and provides direct funding to the YAC."*

What Works in this Partnership?

There are five basic learnings from this partnership.

Firstly, there need to be **positive outcomes for all partners.** Here, the adult Council is able to gain easy access to a form of youth consultation for the development of any Council actions or policies. Terasa points out that:

> *What we can give them is that voice, clearly being heard from this group – a youth perspective on issues. Not so long ago we had a meeting with Council for our input on railway lines and the library; they got to see a youth perspective on that.*

The outcomes for young people are that it provides, as Terasa says: *"a voice for young people; we represent the young people in our community. We give the young people out in the community an opportunity – they can come to us and we can take it to Council. Young people are generally also having their voices heard, getting their voices heard through us to the Council and to the community, through running events, having merchandise, portraying your message out there."*

There are substantial positive outcomes for the young people who are involved – skill development, an opportunity to make a positive contribution, helping make Council policy and events better meet the needs of young people – and these have been previously described. These young people also experience increased insight into and confidence with the local political process, and through access to networks and opportunity. Terasa adds:

> *We get insight into how Council works, the process*

and the system, the decisions they make, and what procedures they take. We get community awareness of what's happening out there in the community from the Council minutes. Overall we get an insight into how that works – building bridges between the Council and young people. Someone here might want to be a true Councillor one day, and this is a good way for them to see. "

Secondly, the YAC experience teaches us the importance of **keeping it fun**. Samuel, Tom and Chris describe their involvement: *"Our meetings are pretty cool, though it depends what the meetings are like – if it's proper. Our meetings are casual so you always have fun. Like if we turn up late, it doesn't really matter."* (Samuel) *"You don't need a note like at school."* (Tom) *"You feel like they trust you more."* (Samuel)

Samuel goes on to say: *"You don't have meetings every week; they're spaced out."* Tom adds: *"If you're not here, it's not a big panic – no pressure"* and Chris explains that: *"Events are on the weekend when you're not doing much."* Samuel also says: *"It's not like a job: you don't have to be there all the time"* but Chris notes that *"then you are there 'cos you enjoy it."*

"There's a difference in what's acceptable in terms of what their meetings [the adult Council] are like, and what ours are like," says Gina. *"Our meetings are informal, loud, there's food, and no fixed office bearers. We have a loose process; they have a very set process they have to adhere to. They see the way the young people are doing their business and they think they are just skylarking and having a good time, but if they came in and had a conversation, they'd find out they are organising the next event, working out where we're going to get funding for something."* Daniel recognises this too: *"You hold people with food and drink. They're coming for pizza, but then they're contributing and you get their opinions."*

The contribution of YAC members is also recognised and celebrated with extrinsic rewards such as a party every year, certificates presented by the Mayor, t-shirts, badges, and photos in the paper. Gina says:

" *We make a big hooha out of events, have a professional photographer at all of their*

events, which goes in the Annual Report, and is acknowledged in official documents of Council. When they move on, go off to uni etc, we have a big bash with a compilation DVD created by the members. We always have food at meetings. "

Thirdly, it is important that the process is **accessible and friendly**. This includes the approach of the youth worker, says Terasa:

" *We trust Gina because she was there from the start, and she connects with us: relates and tells stories to make us feel comfortable. There's a very laid back atmosphere. When she walks in it is really good; if she walked in really up tight or flustered or snapped at us, it wouldn't work. For Councils, you need acceptance and to be approachable in order to communicate together, so young people don't feel threatened or reluctant to go up to Councillors or to a committee meeting.* "

Samuel values the facilitator because *"she actually listens to us, not like teachers who just yell at you all the time. She treats us with respect."* Daniel adds that: *"Even the silly ideas: Gina will put them on the board. She never said: 'No, they can't go on the board.'"*
Gina recognises that she's *"willing to listen, willing to have a go, and take risks with them. It doesn't matter how hair-brained the idea,"* she says, *"we'll give it a go. I'm honest to them, and they are back to me – it's transparent. I want them to get out of it what they want, not what I want to get out of it."*

Gina adds that it is also important that the Council itself is accessible and friendly.

" *Our elected member delegate from Council is under 25 and our Mayor is only 31 and came through the YAC. That has a huge influence upon how the elected members treat the YAC and how the community at large sees young people. It doesn't mean that the relationship is always a happy one – a lot of the older elected members still come with fixed ideas about what young people are or aren't.* "

"Having good communication skills, being non-prejudicial, being able to accept a different culture in a sense – young

people's ways or hairdos." To Daniel, these are important aspects of Council's commitment to the partnership. *"It's got to be respectful to want to listen to their opinion. That goes for everyone."* He also suggests that all people's sincerity is vital: *"Kids can pick up someone if they're being fake a lot quicker than people think they might. That also operates in reverse: if the kids don't show respect to the Council members, they would also soon lose their respect, but the kind of people you find at YAC don't tend to be disrespectful. If they are, they soon learn in the meeting procedure that everyone is equal."*

Everyone has been learning about building productive relationships in the partnerships. Gina explains:

> "*At first, the Councillors came in in suits, with stern faces. They found it difficult, because they don't hang out with young people – it's not the cohort that they know. They're getting better at relating with the young people. It's been an interesting process, but every four years there are new Councillors, and every year new YAC members.*
>
> *The odd one or two that are brave enough will come into our meetings and say hello; the really cheeky ones will steal pizza or lollies. Having Daniel who's under 25 has changed things as well. That's changed perceptions; the YAC members see him at every meeting: two or three times a month. The YAC members are quite visible around the building; that's also been very challenging for staff who've been here a long time – the young people hang around, want to come and have a chat to me.*
>
> *When YAC members made formal presentations to Council, it worked but it wasn't engaging. Working together is much more powerful, and that's why we've made the push for youth to be embedded in the strategic plan for the city of Mount Gambier. They can't just be an add-on; they are completely integrated into the plan... The fact that the Council has ratified the youth part of their strategic plan shows that the mindset has changed, that they have to take it on board.* "

The young people consider the critical success factors in building trust between young people and adult decision makers to be: *"Be respectful"* (Samuel); *"They've done what they said they would"* (Chris); *"They say something, then they stick to it"* (Tom); and *"They're honest"* (Katya).

Fourthly, all partners need to recognise that **the youth partners can make a meaningful contribution.** Samuel says that *"We contribute our ideas and what we want. Sometimes the Council asks us, like for the train track, what they could put there"* and Katya suggests that: *"It's just better for the community; there's more stuff around for the young people; it's not just the adults' decision."*

"We've been a lot more accepted with this new term of Councillors," says Terasa Nearmy, *"only because we've had better representation of a Councillor coming to our committee meetings. They're really taking more notice of young people and getting them involved in different things. The Council are trying to put a different image out there, that young people are OK and not just a waste."*

Gina reports that the Council sees that it gets a huge benefit from the partnership because they have access to a youth voice. *"They do use it when needed for consultation,"* she says, and provides the example of the development of the library. *"Young people are very involved in the consultation: what they would like, how they see it, 'cos it's their community space. It's not just what they want as a young person, but what they want as a citizen for the future, 'cos it's their future. It's not just about skate parks: it's about the bigger picture..."*

She says that there's also a willingness on Council to take a risk as well: *"to open up their doors to the views of young people, to take it on board as part of their major plan for the year. That's quite empowering for the young people and speaks to the community that there is a partnership."*

"It's working because there is commitment from Council," says Daniel. *"It's in writing – there are resolutions passed. The other thing that makes this work is the young people themselves – the fact that they see results, they enjoy themselves and they continue to return; it's a work in progress."*

Daniel advises other Councils *"to be willing to give the YAC some power. Present their minutes at Council meetings; have them recorded."*

Finally, it is recognised that **empowered young people can be powerful advocates to engage other young people.** Where an adult facilitator can sit back and make sure that projects come from the young people's own ideas, there will be greater ownership and enthusiasm. Gina has observed that:

> "They are very self motivated and get themselves organised, but like all human beings some of them don't deliver. If it's their event, they will be self-motivated. It's about ownership. If it's their idea, they're going to want to see it happen...
>
> I try not to be the leader; I'm quite deliberate about it. There is nothing worse than having an adult sitting at the top of the room telling you what's going to happen. It's about really being quite passive in the way I facilitate the group, not being overt. I do direct things, but I try to let them go on the journey themselves; creating a safe space where they can explore community issues themselves, whatever they maybe. "

Young people with a sense of ownership and excitement in the YAC can then talk it up amongst their peers. Samuel has experienced this: *"At school we just tell people about it. At the launch of 'It's all good', we were seeing which people were interested in joining the YAC. We just went around and asked people if they ever heard of it, and if they were interested."*

Gina sums up by offering some advice to similar projects:

> "Don't become a pseudo Council. Empower the young people. However big or small the group is, they're your greatest asset. If you support them, they'll make the YAC grow; they'll reach out to the community like you can't, and like the Council can't – because they're doing it in a whole different way and language.
>
> Rewards and recognition for young people are very important.

> Make sure there is a gate keeper, so that if the YAC is successful, that they're not inundated with requests from everywhere; that's a sure fire way to get them cheesed off and they'll leave.

> Ultimately, it's treating them with respect. "

In Summary:

The Mount Gambier Youth Advisory Council (YAC) is a partnership between a local government Council and young people to achieve these goals:

» **Provide advice to Council** for Council policy and decision-making;
» **Organise gigs, festivals and cultural events**;
» **Participate in other fundraising and consultation**;
» Hold **regular meetings with a semi-formal structure;** and
» **Employ a part time adult facilitator** by the Council.

The lessons that the Mount Gambier YAC identifies as critical to the success of its partnership with local government are that:

» There must be **positive outcomes for all partners**;
» You need to **keep it fun**;
» You must **be accessible and friendly**;
» The **partners can make a meaningful contribution**; and
» **Empowered young people can be powerful advocates** to engage other young people.

Grant Making in Partnership with Young People

The Hobson's Bay Youth Voice Committee

THROUGH THE VOICES OF: **MICHELLE, GERALDINE, ALISON, DANIEL, BRENT** AND **VALERIA** (MEMBERS OF THE YOUTH VOICE COMMITTEE) AND **MONIQUE MICHELL-MOYLAN**

In a local government area in Melbourne, a group of young people annually assess, decide on and distribute grants of around $15,500 to local youth-led programs. The *Hobson's Bay Youth Voice Committee* (YVC) is an initiative of the Hobson's Bay City Council, in the Western suburbs of Melbourne.

When it began, the *Youth Voice Committee* had a primary role of annually dispensing and managing grants to participatory youth projects in the local community. That role has grown, and the YVC now also acts as a youth consultative body to Council and other organisations, organises an event in Youth Week, and takes a lobbying role to Council when young people approach them about local issues. The Council also funds a youth worker, Monique Michell-Moylan, as part-time facilitator for the YVC. Thus the *Youth Voice Committee* is a partnership between an adult Local Government Council and a Youth Council, that is mediated and bridged by a youth worker.

Hobson's Bay City Council covers a diverse geographic area, including relatively affluent bayside suburbs like Williamstown, and much poorer suburbs like Laverton. Monique explains that the Committee was a mayoral project of the Council:

" *The Council wanted to make sure that young people were having the opportunity to voice their opinions: that they were consulting with young people in developing policy. They wanted young people to have the opportunity to distribute grants to other young people or groups working with young people, so they could run youth specific activities and events.* "

Young people also have their own goals in joining the Youth Voice Committee. Michelle is 23 years old and has been involved for two years. *"I joined as a way to be in- volved in the community,"* she says, *"to be able to network with other young people and to be able to represent other young people in Hobson's Bay; to feel like you're a part of*

the community, and part of positive change in the community.”

Geraldine is 21 years old. Three years ago she joined the Youth Voice Committee: *“mainly because once I finished High School and started Uni, there wasn’t any opportunity to be involved in the community. When I was at High School, I enjoyed membership of Junior St Vinnies, SRC etc. So the reason was to re-engage with the community after High School. As a first group member, I had the opportunity to shape what I would be part of.”*

Strategies

The *Youth Voice Committee* uses many different approaches in its work. The first strategy is that young people have **full discretion over the distribution of grants** to youth participatory programs.

Valeria, 20 years old, and a member for three years explains the process: *“When we’re making grant-giving decisions, Monique doesn’t really ever offer an opinion on any of the grants. While we rattle on, she just takes down notes on what we say; she takes an impartial role. Which is a good thing ‘cos we’re supposed to make the decision and she allows us to.”*

There is a regular cycle – an annual process – that the *Youth Voice Committee* goes through in administering the Council’s youth-directed project grants. But their role doesn’t stop with deciding on the grants, as they also follow the grantees up to see what happened and undertake a mentoring relationship with these projects, assisting them (where they can) in fulfilling their goals. Monique provides an overview:

" *We administer an annual grants round of $15,500. The young people develop the guidelines and the application form. They advertise the grants, take applications, follow them up, review them, determine successful applications. I then write the letters to applicants advising them of the outcomes (the young people say they want me to do that sort of stuff). Then we distribute the funds.*

Each of them then chooses to mentor a project, gets in touch, asks what assistance they can provide, helps with advertising, goes to the event or activity, then

organises the financial acquittal and evaluation to be completed. "

Each year, the *Youth Voice Committee* also reflects on the process and makes changes to the process based on those reflections. Monique explains:

" *Youth Voice are always talking about how they can do things better. It is reviewed on an annual basis. Yearly priorities are determined through a community mapping. Next year there will be a ‘registration and then meeting with us’ process to assist those who struggle to complete the application form satisfactorily.* "

Secondly, the young people on the *Youth Voice Committee* are also available **for Council and other consultations**.

“The Council give us opportunities as well,” says Alison, who is 19 years old and has been involved for two years, in explaining that the benefits run both ways. *“Whilst it’s good for us to give a youth perspective on issues they’re discussing, I think it’s good for us to have the opportunity to give our input and, with what we say, they make decisions.”*

Monique agrees that there are mutual benefits: *“The Youth Voice Committee helps Council be in touch with what young people want (although it’s very hard for any committee to fully represent the views of all the people they represent in their area) – to use it as a sounding board for any ideas they have involving youth. But it works both ways: we’re looking to get a new youth facility, and the Youth Voice Committee has been advocating to Council on that issue.”*

In recent instances, the *Youth Voice Committee* members have organised a youth consultation prior to providing feedback to Council, because they wanted to more accurately represent the diverse views of the young people involved. Valeria gives an example: *“The Walker Close Drop-in Centre: a lot of the elderly citizens in that area weren’t too happy about young people there, [so] we did a consultation and then the Council asked for our input.”*

“Usually we would write a memo and then possibly [give] a presentation providing the Council with an overview of

what we're doing or recommending," explains Monique. "There is not just Council down; also Council up – and external people wanting to consult with us. With the youth facility, the Youth Voice Committee contacted the Mayor directly by email, to talk to [Council] about why we don't have a dedicated youth space. They advocated directly to those Councillors. Young people had come to the committee and asked: 'Should we start a petition?' to get a youth facility."

Youth Voice Committee members would like to be consulted by Council on broader issues, and both they and Monique advocate for this to occur. This has now begun to occur in some areas, such as the Council's general health plan.

Geraldine argues that while *"a lot of the things they get us to consult on are stereotypically youth oriented – like the skate park"* there are broader opportunities opening up: *"They have done that when they were developing a health plan for the city."*

Some members feel it would be fair for the Council to report back to them, in the same way they report to Council, providing opportunity for young people to choose issues of involvement and consultation. Michelle argues that: *"Yearly we present to them on what we've been involved in, but they don't present much back on what they've done, so we can have a look [and] so we could say: 'We're interested in this, this, and this'."* Geraldine agrees and says: *"It's important for them to be accountable back to us as well – tell us what they've done with it."*

Thirdly, *Youth Voice Committee* members are involved in **deciding the direction of the group**, and in choosing other forms of participation. Monique outlines the scope of young people's decision-making:

> "*There are goals of the Committee that are already set: part of the objectives from Council is to administer the grants. But young people make all those decisions about what **we** want to focus on, **how** we will evaluate the applications, how we can better **mentor** the projects, the acquittal process, what they want to do during youth week, looking for external funding. Last year we said we wanted to re-align the activities of Youth Voice, because it was*

too concentrated in the first half of the year; it meant we had to have two grant rounds, back to back. We basically said how we wanted our timetable to run and the Council were fine with that again."

Outcomes for Young People

Participatory youth practices are known to produce many more positive outcomes for young people, than do non-participatory processes [1]. This is apparent in this project in five areas of positive outcomes that have been identified. Three of these outcomes are observed in the young people directly involved, while the other two are seen as more general positive outcomes for young people in the community.

The first outcome for members of the *Youth Voice Committee* is that the young people involved **grow as members of their community**, through the contribution they make.

Monique sees that: *"The committee members all have some interest in the community and want to bring about change for young people in the community – to make sure the voices of young people are heard."*

Alison reflects on her role in supporting other young people in the community: *"The most effective thing we do is the grants, because it's really good when we get an application and see that a young person has a really good idea and we can give them money – 'cos without that grant, they wouldn't be able to make it happen. You can visit and see that it's put to good use and many young people benefit."* Daniel recently attended his first YVC meeting and is 13 years. What he gains from it, he says, is: *"To be able to give opportunities to other young people in the community and let other young people live up to their potentials."*

Secondly, the committee members are **learning skills and gaining confidence** through administering grants and running the committee. Monique talks about the process of building on the skills of these young people:

> "*They are mentored through this process: initially they learn how to take minutes, meeting procedures, chairing and we continue to provide them with*

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1   See, for example: P Kirby and S Bryson (2002) Measuring the Magic? Evaluating and researching young people's participation in public decision-making. London: Carnegie Young People Initiative.

feedback along the way. We now have a training budget so we'll be looking at doing more focused training. Whenever we're presenting or involved in consultation, I always provide them training and guidance. Training also happens informally through meetings: learning about decision making, how to run the grants, guiding them on what sort of process they want to use for the grants, writing applications for funding, meeting with funders to discuss ideas..."

Mentoring the projects that are receiving grants is also a practical way to develop the skills of committee members.

Thirdly, these young people **gain access to many networks and opportunities**.

Geraldine says that: *"Monique sends us general emails about wider opportunities; like The Source had an online newsletter that she'd send us regular updates about. A lot of educational opportunities: short courses, conferences that young people are invited to – that sort of thing."*

Monique explains that committee members value different outcomes: *"Some members are motivated to be a part of the committee because they're community activists; others are interested in what it provides for them on an individual level - just what they gain out of it skills and experience wise ... all the opportunities it brings. So I keep them in contact with any opportunities I hear about."*

More widely, there are gains for all young people, as this initiative has encouraged **participatory youth programs to develop** within the community.

Geraldine remembers that: *"one of the major areas that we found that young people wanted us to do was sport and recreation: things to do. We've funded a lot of things for sports and recreation activities, like soccer and sports days."* Valeria points particularly to the youth unit of the Williamstown Literary Festival: *"a whole program for young people"* and Michelle points to the Laverton Secondary College Breakfast Club: *"we funded them to have a coffee machine but what they did with that was important. They set up a cafe for young people in the school who weren't as interested in the academic side of things. So they did a course in hospitality and became more engaged in the school by setting up a cafe and learning life skills."*

Valeria reminds us that the outcome was that *"A few of the kids who weren't going to school ended up going back to school to finish that."*

Monique indicates that this work is now having a broader impact on young people's desire to speak up:

"*I believe in youth participation and young people having a say in what happens in their community and taking an active role. Slowly it's starting to happen: young people are getting in touch with us and raising issues with us.*"

The positive process that is adopted by the Committee also means that **negative stereotypes about young people are challenged.**

For Geraldine, this is an important outcome for the whole community:

"*Most importantly [it shows that] not all young people are bad. We have that stigma, particularly in this area, that young people just hang around train stations and graffiti. This is an example of a group of young people who are educated and want to make a contribution. In terms of changing perceptions, it's important that, rather than a group of adult Councillors making decision about young people, it's better to have a group of young people consulting to young people and voicing their position, providing services to young people in that way.*"

Monique notes that Councillors are also impressed by the young people when they present. *"This changes their perception about what young people can do. Some of the church groups that have received grants, and a Lions project: members of those organisations are having their stereotypes broken down by interacting with the YVC, and by having to apply for funding against youth participatory criteria."*

What Works in this Partnership?

The operation of the partnership between the Hobson's Bay *Youth Voice Committee* and the Hobson's Bay Council provides us with five lessons, both about a partnership between a Youth Council and a senior Council, and also

about the factors that support the effective operation of a Youth Council in its own right.

The first thing we learn is that the Council needs to be **supportive and respectful of young people's contributions**, and that young people need to **recognise and acknowledge Council's trust.**

Monique says that the Council views YVC very positively. *"They've been very receptive. When Youth Voice said: 'Why does the Mayor choose the young citizen of the year? Why can't we?', they said: 'OK, you can'. So now the committee receives all the nominations, makes a recommendation and meets with the Mayor to determine the successful applicant."*

"Council wanted to get us more involved," says Valeria. *"After the first session they felt that it really worked. When we presented to Council they said they wanted to give us more responsibility, which I think they did with the Young Citizen of the Year Awards."*

"It really supports the partnership that the Council are so willing to have young people come to Council meetings, present ideas [and] that they give them 100% power in choosing who the grants go to," stresses Monique. Most significantly, she points out that: *"Nothing needs to go back to Council on those decisions."*

She adds: *"It's important not to assume how Council's going to respond, so I try not to put in any boundaries. I suppose we, as a group, just always work out how we're going to state our case. It's put together in the briefing. Or the young people speak to the Councillor who comes to our meetings bimonthly."*

Secondly, the partnership must enable young people to make decisions that are **meaningful** – to them, but also to the wider community. These are essential local decisions, as Geraldine notes: *"When we give out the grants too, I think: 'Young people wouldn't have these opportunities to engage with, without the committee.'"*

Monique has an important role in ensuring that, if anything is happening in Council that relates to young people, the members of the *Youth Voice Committee* are involved or consulted:

"*When I started, it appeared that the Youth Voice Committee mainly focused on the grants process and youth week events. I've tried to open it up because they are meant to be representing young people, advocating for them to be involved in consultation opportunities. For example, at our drop-in centre, the local elderly residents in the area had issues with the young people attending the centre – there was a community meeting held. Before that, young people in the Youth Voice Committee met with the young people from the drop-in centre, then reported at the community meeting and advocated for the drop centre. We're really trying to make that a reality that they are representing young people, trying to make that a key role; exploring that question: 'How do we let young people know that we're here and that we want to feed their ideas into Council?'*"

A third learning is about the importance of the **employment of a youth work facilitator** who is supportive and honest and who understands the partnership. Monique reflects on what she demands of herself:

"*If you're trying to get a Youth Committee to take ownership, be honest with them; this gives you credibility in their eyes and helps them trust you. Be supportive in all other aspects of their lives and look after simple things like ensuring they've got transport for meetings. Give them the skills to take on ownership: if they haven't done that before, talk to them about what their role is and brainstorm ways they can advocate for young people and communicate with those that they're around...*

I help nurture and support them, build their confidence. I help them in any things external to Youth Voice that they're interested in and want to do – I provide them with guidance, possible referrals and act as a referee when requested.

I'm always trying to advocate for them, for their rights, the basic things they should have: transport and food provided, reimbursement when they are involved in consultation.

And I have a good time. I get inspired by their

passion: the fact that a lot of them are juggling many balls in the air. I get a lot of support from them; they're always very supportive of me and of the fact that I'm very open and honest with them. I'm genuinely interested in their lives and how I can support them to get out there and do good stuff. "

The process that is adopted must **enable participation by young people in areas and on levels that they want** and that make sense to them.

In this case, an important participation was on the interview panel when the youth work facilitator position became vacant. Young people were concerned both with how applicants related with young people, and whether they had enough experience and attitude to push for the *Youth Voice Committee* to have a stronger role beyond grant giving and youth week. Michelle describes this:

> "*A few of us sat in on the group for hiring Monique, so we had some input in who was going to be involved. We were part of the interviewing committee that was asking the questions, so we were watching how she engaged with us and what she could contribute to the youth committee.*"

Geraldine adds:

> "*We were just starting up, [and] all we were doing was organising an event for youth week and giving out grants. We were looking for a youth worker who would help us have more of a role than that.*"

In response, Monique now talks about challenging young people's ideas about what the group can achieve, but also being realistic about what is possible in young people's complex lives:

> "*I talk with them about trying to strive for the top of the youth participation ladder. In the past, for example, the guidelines were written for them for the grants, rather than them doing it; so we've done a lot of work to make sure that, for every facet, they can do it themselves.*
>
> *We are looking at the idea of setting up sub-committees for events type work in the future. They*

are all over-committed in what they're doing in their lives; when they get to meetings, that's good, and we do what we need to while they're there. "

Finally, we can recognise that the **process needs to be fun, flexible and welcoming of engagement**. Daniel notes that: *"the meetings we attend here are enjoyable. It's a light and friendly atmosphere."* Monique points to the need to build this into strategies and budgets: *"It's important to have some funds to be able to do your own reward and recognition within the group – to do some social stuff and reward the work of the group. I have fun with them as well – a factor that needs to be a part of any Youth Council."*

She also stresses that it's important to accept and welcome people's commitment at any level: *"It's good to have flexible options for membership. Some people are only able to come once a month; young people doing Year 12 will drop off. It's important to be flexible. We welcome people back even when we haven't seen them for a while."*

Advice for others

When asked about advice for other Councils who might be considering a partnership with a youth committee, the young people emphasised the need for respect towards the young people, and recognition that they have different views and experiences. Brent, who is 18 years and a member of YVC for two years suggested that: *"An adult Council will have to have a certain level of acceptance that our views may be different to theirs 'cos we haven't had the life experience; the age difference has to be taken into account."*

Monique endorses that. *"If you're trying to get a Council to respect and act on young people's views, it's important first of all that there's a commitment there. If there isn't, lobby and advocate to get that commitment. Get support from the area in which you work: youth services or community development. Go through the appropriate channels, Council meetings etc..."*

But, most importantly, she says, *"speak to the young people"* and recognise their power to take initiatives:

" *The young people can contact Councillors. They have successfully lobbied, for example, with the youth facility – the Council has committed to looking at concept plans. Even getting to that stage has been difficult and required a push from young people going to Council meetings. These young people e-mailed the Mayor and other Councillors to ask what was happening on that issue. They are quite passionate and are pushing for it – which I think has come from the Youth Voice Committee pushing the agenda. It's about helping young people to recognise how they can harness their power to get what they want. "*

In Summary:

The *Hobson's Bay Youth Voice Committee* (YVC) is an initiative of the Hobson's Bay City Council, in the Western suburbs of Melbourne. When it began, the *Youth Voice Committee* had a primary role of annually dispensing and managing grants to participatory youth projects in the local community. That role has grown, and the YVC now also acts as a youth consultative body to Council and other organisations, organises an event in Youth Week, and takes a lobbying role to Council when young people approach them about local issues.

The lessons that the *Hobson's Bay Youth Voice Committee* identifies as critical to the success of its partnership with local government are that:

» the Council needs to be **supportive and respectful** of young people's contributions, and young people need to **recognise and acknowledge Council's trust**;
» the partnership must enable young people to make decisions that are **meaningful** – to them, but also to the wider community;
» the **employment of a youth work facilitator** who is supportive and honest and who understands the partnership;
» the process must enable **participation by young people in areas and on levels that they want and that make sense to them**; and
» the process also to be **fun, flexible and welcoming of engagement**.

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

STORY	Communities owning and directing the partnerships	Nurturing trust and respect within the partnerships	Valued contributions from all partners	Valued benefits for all partners (including young people)	Other
The Opal Alliance	Community ownership	Trust, a mutually decided strategy and a shared intent	Making use of the different strengths of each partner		
RYSS Youth Arts Warehouse			All partners have a clear and common purpose	Connect partners to the positive outcomes for young people and providing positive publicity	Involve community minded people with business influence and know how; Youth participation
Parramatta Children's Court Assistance Scheme		A shared commitment	Respect for each partner's contribution	Benefits for all partners	Prove your worth over time
Crossroads Reconnect Collaborative Project Work	Locally derived projects and networks	A collaborative approach and cultural sensitivity			Flexible funding and supportive leadership; An action research cycle
Connect Central Consortium	Locally derived and locally accountable, with a shared local intent	Generating trust and mutual respect between partners		Improved efficacy for partners	Be strategic about who is involved
Transit Guards		Manage group dynamics effectively		Clear understanding of each agency's priorities	Finding a broker
Youth Support Coordinators in Schools	Locate youth workers in schools, but employ them via a community agency	Employ people with bridge building capabilities	Each partner values what the other partner has to offer		Prove its worth over time; Youth workers are part of a state-wide structure
Sevenoaks Youth Worker in School	The youth workers need to maintain strong and confident relationships with local welfare agencies		The school values youth work		Embed youth workers within a school wide advocacy and welfare procedure
Shellharbour City Council Youth Services Schools Program		The Youth Service needs to develop the relationship in a conciliatory manner over time		Obvious benefits for all partners	Provide a distinctly different service to young people to that which the school can provide

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

STORY	Communities owning and directing the partnerships	Nurturing trust and respect within the partnerships	Valued contributions from all partners	Valued benefits for all partners (including young people)	Other
The Yiriman Project	Community ownership			Positive outcomes felt by all partners	A middle generation acting as bridges and role models
Mount Gambier City Council Youth Advisory Council		Be accessible and friendly	Partners can make a meaningful contribution	Positive outcomes for all partners	Keep it fun Empowered young people can be powerful advocates to engage other young people
Hobson's Bay Youth Voice Committee		Council needs to be supportive and respectful, and young people recognise and acknowledge Council's trust A youth work facilitator who is supportive and honest		Young people have opportunity to make decisions that are meaningful to them and others	Make it fun and flexible Enable participation of young people in areas and on levels they want and that make sense to them

So What Does Work in Partnerships in the Youth Sector?

The partnerships that are outlined in this publication each provide strong lessons about their successes. Sometimes it is hard to untangle the lessons that are important from the grounded experiences of working successfully to meet the needs of young people, from those that are intrinsic to the operation of successful partnerships. We asked all participants to comment specifically on the lessons they had learnt from their collaborations – and what stories they would tell others.

As we listened to the responses from these young people, youth workers, community members, business people, local government officials and so on around Australia, we were struck both by how individual (and locally dependent) their learnings were, but also by the consistency in the comments (though they were said in different ways and with different examples).

While the successes of these partnerships depend enormously on the enthusiasms, commitments and understandings of individuals – and we cannot discount the importance of this – we need to seek the lessons that go beyond the personal. After all, people move on and new partners emerge. In listening to the stories, we were constantly reflecting about what these partnerships are learning, and about what they are telling us ... about what works.

We have summarised the responses of the projects in the table that is included here. Within the diversity of comments, there are four clear themes that talk of **ownership** of the partnership, **trust and respect**, **valuing everyone's contributions**, and achieving **valued outcomes for all**.

Communities owning and directing the partnerships

The first common issue that resonates through these stories has also been predicted in much of the literature about successful partnerships . These partnerships benefited from and were strengthened by being **locally derived and locally directed**. We can see this in particular in projects such as *Crossroads Reconnect* and *Connect*

Central, in which the partnerships emerged from the recognition by many agencies of specific local needs. A strong commitment from all partners, and clear outcomes for young people, has been built on this local identification of need.

Connect Central's John Bonnice explains the power of such 'localism', which is contrasted with 'top-down' directed partnerships:

> "*This partnership hasn't happened because anyone told us to. Lots of other alliances have been driven or directed by government. This whole initiative came from people on the ground – which makes it much better. It's easier because we want to do it, have a commitment to it, and have created it ourselves.*"

Bendigo participant, John Geary, likens their *Transitions* collaboration to other examples of community creations of solutions that involve whole-of-community responsibility and ownership both of the issues of disadvantage and of the strategies to address them:

> "*They might believe their accountability is to the federal or state government (which may be true in a sense), but that's money that has been generated from taxes in this area, and that needs to be used in an appropriate manner to target disengaged young people. This should be planned and accountable back to local stakeholders. The criticism is that, in the past, there hasn't been anyone local to closely monitor the outcomes of programs. Reporting has happened previously to Melbourne or Canberra.*"

Such local understanding, development and management also provide a firm basis for other positive aspects of partnerships. Locally responsive partnerships can provide opportunities for the development of holistic service approaches for young people through the linking of disparate sectors. These relationships have the potential to undo the divisiveness of competitive tendering; they can promote whole-of-community responses in which

each agency has a role to play and a specialisation that need not be in competition with another agency. For example, whilst the *Youth Transition Support Initiative* is managed within the *Connect Central* partnership, the agency operating the very similar *JPET* project is highly supportive; it does not see itself as being a local competitor but takes the attitude that there are more than enough disadvantaged young people to 'go round'.

In the collaborative project work of *Yiriman* and *Crossroads Reconnect*, youth workers were able to work in culturally appropriate ways and to act as facilitators for community directed projects. This was possible because they started from the assumption that their communities were best placed to govern their own youth projects and therefore took an empowering, community development approach to their partnership.

Locally directed partnerships can also **respond to change** in locally specific ways. For example, *Shellharbour Youth Services* has sought out local partnerships with schools so they can work where the young people are, responding to changes in education and employment. The *Yiriman* project has responded to cultural and technological changes and is strategically using music, digital media and adventure to engage young people in learning traditional knowledge and language.

Very few of the projects had a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the partners. Where these did exist, they tended to be in plain language, were clearly articulated and specified the mutually understood roles and expectations within these partnerships. Elsewhere, for example in the *Yiriman* project, it is clearly understood that the community's cultural bosses make the main decisions, and that the youth workers must 'run everything by them' ie consult for all important decisions.

In the only project with a formal agreement (*YSC* in Hervey Bay), this is a state-wide MoU that is determined and implemented from above and that provides a formal framework for the development and clarification of local understandings. Whilst we are identifying the locally determination of understandings about ways of working as a criterion of good practice, this externally determined MoU was surprisingly successful and played an important role in the partnership's success. With Youth Support

Coordinators working within three or four schools in the area, the MoU describes the schools' responsibilities in terms of minimum workplace conditions for the youth worker. Given the potential power disparity between an individual youth worker and a secondary school or TAFE (and its system), here it is advantageous that the central organisation oversees – and hence champions – youth workers' rights and conditions by way of a top-down MoU.

So we learn a variation on this lesson: where there are disparate real or potential power relationships between partners, it is valuable to have a formal relationship to fall back on. Where partners meet locally, with relatively balanced power relationships, trust in partnerships can be expressed more informally.

Nurturing trust and respect within partnerships
The need for trust between partners was identified as being high on the agenda of all these partnerships and, in most instances, this trust was generated by **reliable and respectful behaviour** over time.

The development of trust is both personal and institutional; it can be uncomfortable and involve slow work. In particular, inter-sectoral and inter-agency partnerships (with differing cultures and assumptions) can battle against suspicion of sectoral and self-interest, misunderstanding and consequently mistrust. Many of these partnerships were successful because they made strategic choices about **who** would be involved, and what demands made on each other. This can be explicit as, in one partnership, deciding that 'control freaks' (ie persons who could not be flexible and respect others' needs) were to be excluded.

Trust was also built on predictability. In the *Opal Alliance*, the community agencies were conscious that trust would be eroded and the partnership endangered if they didn't stick to their agreed advocacy and media strategy. They noted that it was vital that GPT (their business partner) *"didn't look in the media every morning wondering what they'd got into"*.

Several of these partnerships are succeeding because the youth and community sector workers' advocacy for young people is carried out in manner that is strong but

not antagonistic to those in positions of power. This was particularly true for the *Opal Alliance* that successfully lobbied for a change in government policy by finding allies within the federal government bureaucracy, and carried out their campaign in a way that allowed the government to take ownership of positive outcomes. Similarly, within the *Mount Gambier YAC*, the Youth Advisory Council successfully challenged the absence of a youth policy within the Council's Strategic Plan through a process of local diplomacy. Within the *Connect Central* consortium, the schools and other education providers acknowledge the essential nature of the youth sector's contribution to addressing student disengagement. Backed up by quantitative data, and many years of confident advocacy, youth workers in Bendigo are taking an influential and respected role in a cross-sectoral partnership.

We were made aware that these roles do not always come naturally to a sector that places itself alongside the marginalised, that makes a social justice analysis of disadvantage, and that usually advocates strongly against those institutions that it perceives as perpetuating disadvantage (including political parties, police, schools and so on). Elsewhere, this may have led youth workers and agencies to view other institutions with suspicion and antagonism and hence to carry out their own, separate initiatives. The successful examples of partnerships documented here show that many individuals and agencies have needed to fundamentally change their relationships with others, and have built working relationships based on mutual respect.

In the *RYSS* project, the youth agency manager regularly approaches Rotary clubs in the region and challenges them to begin their community contribution at home, by contributing to the youth service. Many of these clubs include community leaders and heads of industry; she encourages them to get involved, to enjoy witnessing their contribution, and to take advantage of the positive publicity she can attract. This strategy became highly effective when this worker found the right allies – within business and Rotary – who then became the youth service's strongest advocates within the community.

The development of respectful and trusting relationships is founded on the individuals within the partnership.

These partnerships have succeeded by locating powerful people within the community who have a commitment to the wellbeing of young people. They have promoted interactions between young people and these powerful figures, in ways that have increased young people's social capital (including opening doors for young people within their communities). Through these relationships, young people are seen to be making meaningful contributions to the community and are recognised for it, and this enhances their sense of being a vital part of the community – a citizen today rather than one in waiting.

In many instances, active and empowered young people will themselves be a youth worker's strongest allies within the partnerships. The *Yiriman* project, *RYSS* and *Mount Gambier YAC* all recognised and put effort into developing and skilling a small group of young people, who then achieved far more in motivating their peers than a youth worker could do. In these three instances, a huge amount of worker and organisational time and resources was devoted to a relatively small number of young people, but that investment has borne results as, several years down the track, each project is flourishing with those young people impressing their peers and advocating effectively for the program and its activities.

Another way of recognising the importance of the development of trust is to identify the role of 'bridge-builders' in these partnerships. There are substantial cultural differences between sectors, in particular between education and welfare, and these can be eased by people who are well placed, and who are capable and comfortable to create an interface between sectors. Young leaders can be this bridge (eg the young cultural bosses in *Yiriman*) as can youth workers, counsellors or teachers with the appropriate temperament.

The essence of being a bridge is to provide the necessary linkage between two worlds that need to know and understand each other in order to co-ordinate meeting the needs of young people. Yet being that bridge can be a lonely position, not entirely at home in either world.

In Queensland, the *Youth Support Coordinator* (YSC) program very deliberately positions youth workers as these bridge builders in local partnerships. There are strong demands on them in these roles. They are

administratively located within community agencies, where they are supported and theoretically have a home base. However in the breakdown of their week, the community agency is likely to be their work location only after school hours and for occasional meeting or paperwork time. For most of their week, YSCs don't have a regular social or work environment at their agency to support them; they are moving between schools (and are generally spread across four or more schools), so may not have continuity and regularity there either. In addition, each YSC works in relative isolation, coming in and out of work cultures set by others. They work within the education sector, yet are not education workers; they are youth workers, yet are not working within or amongst other youth or welfare workers.

The role of bridge builder sits in the grey areas of uncertainty. It requires workers to be diplomatic, friendly and productive. Youth workers come into schools or other institutions as outsiders, and need to maintain the integrity and uniqueness of their own contribution as a youth work professional in order to build and maintain trust.

What challenges trust – and how can those challenges be overcome? The process of nurturing trust may be difficult where there have been previous negative stereotypes of sectors, or bad experiences between partners. Rebuilding trust may only be achieved by all partners proving their worth over time. This has been necessary in all the instances of partnerships with schools that are documented here. In each case, the youth workers had to work hard to be accepted and valued. However, there are positive lessons from these stories. Similarly, the *Yiriman* and *Crossroads Reconnect* projects, where a mainstream agency engaged with Indigenous or CLD agencies, show that trust can be gained if youth workers approach communities by *listening* and *expecting to learn*, rather than approaching other community organisations arrogantly or with pre-conceived projects.

While the promotion of partnerships was a key strategy of the Federal Government's approach to the youth sector over the last decade, it sat alongside demands for the competitive tendering of services. These are, in many ways, contradictory strategies. Partnerships require trust (locally as well as more broadly); competition

(particularly between local services) erodes that trust. Several of these stories, most notably *Connect Central* in Bendigo, reflect discussions that are occurring across Australia, particularly within regional centres. These discussions are about ways to engender trust, ways to undo the damage done by competitive tendering and, through this, ways to achieve better outcomes for young people.

The solutions that many communities are finding again involve promoting a sense of community responsibility and ownership of local problems and their solutions. There are strong assertions of accountability here, but that accountability is based within a community's right to determine the use of local funding for its young people. If agencies are operating ineffectively, then the local community should be holding them to account, and demanding a better use of those resources for the good of young people, and thus the whole community.

Valued contributions from all partners
The third common theme that emerges from these stories of successful partnerships is about all partners acknowledging and valuing each other's contributions.

In talking with the partners, it was clear that their contributions were enormously varied and went far beyond financial provisions. In no case, for example, did all partners contribute equal funding to the partnership. Yet this was not a divisive issue, for partners recognised and valued the different contributions each made. Where one partner was disproportionately funding the project, this could occur without disrupting shared ownership of the project, because funding was flexibly applied between the partners. For example, the *Crossroads Reconnect* collaborative project work succeeded (in part) because of this flexibility in funding; *Reconnect* did not demand prescriptive quantified plans of projects, and this enabled *Crossroads Reconnect* to assist CLD community agencies to experiment and evolve projects based on community demand and expectations. It was important that this was partnership funding with partnership outcomes. *Crossroads Reconnect* was therefore not required to claim sole credit, or assign outcomes (in terms of the numbers of young people assisted, for example) within their own data – and to the exclusion of other partners.

Similarly, the *Yiriman* project's auspicing agency *(KA-LACC)* obtained flexible funding, which did not prescribe in advance the activities or bush-trips to be undertaken, and this has enabled the youth workers to undertake collaborative work which is responsive to community directions. In both these instances of cross-cultural collaboration, a crucial feature of the approach is that of one agency helping to access funding, but then providing that access in a facilitative and 'listening' manner.

There are potentially dangers in the differential provision of resources, in particular possibilities of paternalistic or manipulative attitudes from the partner facilitating the funding. However, this is not apparent where all partners recognise the contributions made by others. Mutual respect acknowledges the importance of the in-kind contributions of each partner: the specialised knowledge and reputation of *Australian Lebanese Welfare* or the ability of the young leaders in the *Yiriman* project to motivate their peers and so on.

In fact, the unique professional contributions that partners made was frequently the very point of the partnership. In the three school-based youth work projects detailed here, the common feature was, on the one hand, schools that valued the unique contribution of youth work and, on the other hand, youth workers who valued the care and professionalism of schools. *Seveno-aks* had a school administration that, from the school's inception, saw the value of youth work as the core of its welfare approach. In *Hervey Bay* and *Shellharbour*, while the unique contribution of youth work was not immediately recognised by schools, it has been valued through youth workers providing their contributions over time. These youth workers contributed high quality counselling and group work, demonstrating their skills, and thus have, in time, created spaces for more explicit youth work approaches such as advocacy and empowerment. The youth workers have succeeded within schools with this approach, because they also genuinely value and are willing to acknowledge the contribution of teachers and schools to the young people with whom they work.

The valued contributions made by youth workers within schools centre around their skills in developing consensual, non-judgemental and egalitarian relationships with young people. There are numerous barriers to teachers being able to develop such relationships: class sizes, school disciplinary procedures, the professional expectations placed on teachers, individuals' attachments to power and so on. However the three examples of youth work in schools demonstrate that youth workers within schools can, within receptive schools and over time, model and promote relationships with young people that reduce the power battles that can sometimes escalate into disciplinary procedures, suspension and expulsion.

These stories teach us that, if youth work is to succeed in other environments, individual youth workers need to identify and hold fast to the unique contributions they can make to partnership. They must promote the value of a non-judgemental, friendly approach to young people, which empowers them and which advocates for a social justice analysis of disadvantage. In several of these stories – in *Sevenoaks*, in *Shellharbour*, within the *YSC* program, the *PCCAS* and *Connect Central* – youth workers are holding onto the integrity of their role, and the partnerships are successful because of those valued contributions.

Valued benefits for all partners (including young people!)

Finally, but arguably centrally, successful partnerships focus on achieving clear and positive outcomes – particularly for young people. Codes of Ethical Practice within the youth sector make it clear who should be the main recipient of positive outcomes:

> *The primary consideration of the youth worker is the young people with whom they engage. This does not mean that they are the only people that youth workers are concerned with, but it does mean that youth workers' key responsibility is to the young person/ people with whom they are working.*

It is not sufficient that partnerships achieve benefits for the individual partners (such as achieving greater efficiencies or smoother operations), unless those partner benefits achieve demonstrable outcomes for young people. It should be (but sadly sometimes isn't) the case that positive outcomes for young people overlap with the achievement of a positive outcome for workers within their practice. The satisfaction of achieving agency and

organisational goals can be a powerful force endorsing partnership success.

In many of the projects studied, there was a strong sense of commitment and ongoing enthusiasm for the partnership because all partners recognised *ongoing and demonstrable benefits for themselves*. In each of these stories, we have tried to identify the separate benefits for partners. For example, in the *Parramatta Children's Court Assistance Scheme*, youth work agencies volunteering their staff time were obtaining client referrals, improving connections with other agencies and gaining professional development for staff. The Legal Aid solicitors were able to fulfil their role more effectively because they did not have to complete administrative tasks, and the welfare needs of their clients were being met.

In the *Connect Central* consortium, the schools, TAFE and adult education providers are increasing their commitment and contributions to the partnership because they have experienced increased efficacy: they are working more effectively with marginalised young people as a result of their participation in the partnership. Their counterparts on the welfare and youth side of the partnership have gained more ability to approach and access the services they need to assist young people in transition.

In the *Yiriman* project, the auspicing agency is able to achieve its goal of preserving language and culture through partnership with communities. In turn, the communities are gaining access to the resources and effective facilitation they need to run their bush trips. Young leaders are gaining the skills and capacities that they identify as important.

In *Shellharbour*, the Council Youth Services have used outreach work, including partnerships with schools, to achieve a substantial shift in their visibility and accessibility to young people. Similarly, at *Sevenoaks*, the role of youth workers as bridges between schools and the local welfare sector tangibly benefits their work, again through increased visibility and accessibility. In both of these partnerships, success for the youth services was delivered by taking youth services to where young people were, rather than expecting young people to come to the specialised youth or welfare services.

The key lesson from all of these stories is that the involvement of all partners will be maintained if, and only if, they all continue to see that there are outcomes and that they are getting something out of their involvement. As we have seen. these positive outcomes range from tangible benefits such as access to resources, funding, opportunities and skill development, through to less tangible benefits such as efficacy (a sense of effectively fulfilling goals) and opportunities to make a contribution to a community.

Such a full range of outcomes is acknowledged in both the *Mount Gambier YAC* and the *Hobson's Bay Youth Voice Committee*. Here is recognised that young people seek many complex and different outcomes from their participation. The adult facilitators of these Youth Councils have achieved a long period of active partnership between local government and the youth council by ensuring they provide many and diverse opportunities for young people to experience direct benefits from their participation.

The Participation Question

When we started to examine these stories of successful partnerships, we expected to highlight the importance of the active participation of young people in all these partnerships. An often-cited criterion of good practice across the youth sector is that of participation, and previous studies have asserted that young people and their families should "define the nature and location of services provided" [40]. This, it is suggested, should guide the nature and processes of the partnerships that are formed.

However, the practices we discovered were much more varied. In these examples, youth participation was very rarely a focus in the formation or evolution of the youth sector partnership. While the collaborations generated substantial positive outcomes for young people, young people were seldom there as active partners.

There are some exceptions. While there were no young people on the steering group that directed the building of the warehouse in the *RYSS Youth Arts Warehouse* development, young people had other, partly participatory roles. There were structural

reasons within the partnership that deterred formal participation: steering committee meetings were at 7:30 am for example. And both workers and young people commented that young people would have found such participation boring. On the other hand, the project facilitated young people's involvement in the stages they chose, and allowed them to avoid the stages they didn't have interest in. They participated in planning and dreaming for the space, in videoing the transformation and now in programming activities there; but weren't required to sit through many long, administrative meetings. Similar issues were identified in the account of the *Perth Transit Guards* partnership, where we are warned about the dangers of tokenistic involvement of a few young people that ignores underlying diversity and tensions.

The *Mount Gambier YAC* and the *Hobson's Bay Youth Voice Committee* have taken approaches that emphasise both formal and informal participation opportunities. There is no compulsion to come to meetings and the emphasis is on action (in *Mount Gambier* on organising events, and in *Hobson's Bay* on disbursing grants). However the meetings are designed to be as fun as possible, there is always yummy food, and formal protocols have been done away with to allow young people to enjoy meetings. Consequently they come back.

In many of these stories, we find example where young leaders are given positions of responsibility (as in the *Yiriman* project), where they form cross-cultural bridges to older members of their community and to their peers. This is an effective form of participation on many levels.

But questions remain about opportunities for the inclusion of young people as respected partners within these partnerships. Would outcomes have been greater if young people had greater participation? How should partnership structures and relationships – early morning or boring meetings; complex negotiations; recognition of diverse contributions and needs – change, in order to meet the interests and needs of young people within a partnership? What possibilities exist for young people to develop project management skills through participation that goes beyond consultation? How can such inclusive partnerships avoid tokenistic involvement of a few young people?

The second publication in this series is about 'What works in young people getting active in the community?'

These questions and themes will be revisited there, from the perspective of projects that emphasise the active participation of young people. What will we learn about possibilities for partnerships from these?

Conclusion

The projects selected within this document have generally not yet been evaluated, and these stories in no way provide – or seek to provide – such an objective or rigorous evaluation. They are rather a celebration of what is seen to be working within each project. Their value within this document is primarily in helping us learn from them.

This was never a competition. The projects that we have profiled here are not being held up as the 'best' projects; nor do they provide an uncritical guide for others to adopt. The description of *What Works* is not intended as a prescription or recipe to be replicated. In fact, the very success of the projects is that they have been a local response to local needs.

But each of these projects is achieving positive outcomes within its area, at this point in time. These practitioners are sharing some reflections that are helpful and thought-provoking for other practitioners – and that might guide the thinking and partnership formation in other areas. The questions that these projects have asked and answered may be the most useful transferable information here.

In particular the outstanding achievements of the *Yiriman* project and the *Opal Alliance* need to be held up as community generated and owned solutions. These are deserving of special celebration at a time when there has been much denigration and discussion of failures in Indigenous programs. The same spirit can be applied to the other projects.

The twelve partnerships outlined here are also the 'tip of the iceberg'. There are vibrant and effective youth sector partnerships occurring right across the country. Many communities – in cities, towns and country areas – are forming productive alliances that seek and achieve solutions to the challenges faced by their young people. We congratulate them.

Fiona Taylor

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