



**KILDONAN UNITINGCARE**

**RE-ENGAGING DISENGAGED YOUTH:  
A RESEARCH & PROGRAM DESIGN PROJECT**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
	BACKGROUND & PURPOSE .....	3
	PROJECT DESIGN .....	4
	OUTLINE OF THIS REPORT.....	5
<b>2</b>	<b>BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW ON ENGAGING DISENGAGED YOUTH .....</b>	<b>6</b>
	ISSUES & CHALLENGES RELATING TO YOUTH DISENGAGEMENT .....	6
	<i>Personal</i> .....	6
	<i>Home Life &amp; Parenting</i> .....	8
	<i>School Environment</i> .....	8
	<i>Social Disadvantage</i> .....	10
	<i>Services &amp; Service System</i> .....	10
	<i>Youth Program Design</i> .....	11
	CONCLUSION .....	13
<b>3</b>	<b>SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM CONSULTATIONS.....</b>	<b>14</b>
	METHODOLOGY.....	14
	FINDINGS.....	15
	<i>Issues &amp; Challenges</i> .....	15
	<i>Characteristics of Successful Programs</i> .....	19
	<i>Programmatic Issues &amp; Barriers in Engaging Disconnected Youth</i> .....	25
	<i>Suggestion for Programs to Engage Disengaged Youth</i> .....	27
	<i>Possible Service Contributions</i> .....	32
	CONCLUSION .....	33
<b>4</b>	<b>MAIN POINTS FROM THE LITERATURE &amp; CONSULTATIONS TO INFORM BRIEF PROGRAM DESIGN.....</b>	<b>34</b>
	GOALS .....	34
	PROGRAM DESIGN FACTORS .....	34
	RESOURCING CONSIDERATIONS .....	36
	CONCLUSION .....	36
<b>5</b>	<b>PROPOSED DESIGN FOR A BRIEF PROGRAM FOR DISENGAGED YOUTH: ‘GOING PLACES’ .....</b>	<b>37</b>
	DRAFT PROGRAM OVERVIEW .....	37
	<i>Program Aim</i> .....	37
	<i>Program Approach</i> .....	37
	<i>Program Details</i> .....	37
	<i>Program Intake</i> .....	38
	<i>Waiting Period</i> .....	38
	<i>Program Phases &amp; Content</i> .....	39
	<i>Evaluation</i> .....	41
	<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>42</b>

**ATTACHMENT ONE:  
RESEARCH LITERATURE GRID**

**ATTACHMENT TWO:  
SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM COMPONENTS: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON DISENGAGED  
YOUTH PROGRAMS & SUCCESS FACTORS**

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## Background & Purpose

The impetus for this project was the concern raised about the shortage of options for young people who have become disengaged from education, training and work engagement – in particular long waiting lists for youth programs in the area.

In early 2011, at a Hume Whittlesea Youth Connections (HWYC) meeting, representatives from the Hume Whittlesea Local Learning and Employment Network (HWLLEN) and Kildonan UnitingCare raised concerns about the lack of activities for young people currently on The Pavilion School waiting list. People on this waiting list are considered to be at risk of further disengagement and therefore in need of attention and support. The HWYC Lead Agent, Northern Melbourne Institute of Technology (NMIT), agreed to allocate Type 3 Youth Connections funds to address the immediate needs of this group but also to look at the allocation of Type 4 funds to develop a long term regional response.<sup>1</sup>

Consultation with The Pavilion School indicated that there were 26 young people on its waiting list. Student capacity at The Pavilion is 60 and therefore it was not anticipated that those on the waiting list would be offered a place in 2011.

The Youth Connections Case Manager at Kildonan also found that many of her clients had been placed on long waiting lists, not just for The Pavilion but for a range of alternative settings and training programs. Her report highlighted the further vulnerability of disengaged young people.<sup>2</sup>

Thus a decision was made to commission Kildonan to carry out a research project to develop a program of integrated activities initially targeting young people on the Pavilion School waiting list but could also be delivered as a preparatory program for young people returning to education or training after a period of disengagement. This was intended to complement the direction of Type 3 Youth Connections activities that had already been planned to provide an immediate response for young disengaged people in the local area.

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<sup>1</sup> A continuum of educational options in Victoria has four tiers, with Tier 1 being lowest risk of disengagement and Tier 4 being highest. Tier 4 flexible learning options are for those who require more complex and intensive services and supports to re-engage with education. Tier 3 flexible learning options involve intervening early to address the issues that are preventing a young person's full engagement with school and learning (DEECD, 2010, pp. 14, 15).

<sup>2</sup> The research by Eliana Deur is referred to in this report, including Attachment A.

## Project Design

The project design included the following (based on the MOU between Kildonan UnitingCare and NMIT with some modifications as negotiated with the Steering Group)

1. Research a curriculum of engagement programs identifying strengths and potential for adaptation to this region and group of disengaged young people.
2. Consultation with teachers and youth workers at The Pavilion. (*One teacher at The Pavilion was interviewed as well as the Principal and a Social Worker*).
3. Consultation with Youth Connections service delivery members about current Type 3 activities and how some of these might be integrated into a cohesive program for disengaged young people wanting to return to education/training or employment as an apprentice or trainee.
4. Focus groups/interviews with parents/carers and young people. (*One parent was interviewed and a focus group was carried out with 3 young people*).
5. Consultation with local services and training organisations to investigate the potential for some of the existing activities being linked into an 8 week program.
6. Development of an approximately 8 week long program, to commence in Term 4 and through to 2012 pending ongoing Youth Connections funding. Design a service delivery model and evaluation framework.

The process for the research was sequential and reiterative, with findings from early phases being used to inform following research activities and avenues for consultation as well as collective analysis. The steering group was highly engaged in the project and played a central role in this.

Data was gathered from a range of sources, with the various types of information being ‘triangulated’ or analysed as a whole, in acknowledgement that different research methods provide different types of information and that the weaknesses in some may be compensated by the strengths of other approaches.

Information collected through the consultations was a central data source for this project and was qualitative in nature. Through this approach, the complex, many faceted nature of the social world as relating to youth disengagement could be better understood. Discussions also allowed for sense to be made of participant responses through the reflexive to-and-fro of the conversational format and participants were able to exercise control over the content of the information they imparted, including the social meaning they attributed to social phenomena and contexts.

## **Outline of this Report**

Following this introduction, Section Two provides an outline of the most relevant research literature on disengaged and re-engaging youth (with a more detailed account provided in Attachment One). In Section Three, findings from the consultations carried out for this project are provided.

In Section Four, key principles are drawn from both the literature and the consultations to inform the design of a brief program for disengaged young people, who might otherwise find themselves on program waiting lists for long periods. These principles are then applied to a program design in Section Five, which forms the focus of the project.



## 2 BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW ON ENGAGING DISENGAGED YOUTH

While issues relating to youth disengagement, as covered in the research literature, can be meaningfully grouped according to the categories of: personal, home life/parenting, school environment, service system and social disadvantage, it is also clear that all of these factors are closely interconnected.

An overview of youth disengagement issues is provided in this section under these headings, along with the main ideas, proposals and service approaches to address these. (A more detailed account with full referencing is provided in Attachment One).

### Issues & Challenges Relating to Youth Disengagement

#### Personal

A few common factors relating to personal difficulties emerge in the research literature on disengaged youth. These include drug and alcohol issues, troubled mental health, behavioural problems, poor socialisation, low self esteem, disability and abuse (with young people either being perpetrator or victim of bullying). Learning difficulties, low numeracy, low literacy and poor school achievement are also common themes. In addition, while youth disengagement may relate to criminality, crime and violence have also been identified as a central concern for young people.

Some research also cites low motivation and a lack of career aspiration as ongoing factors in disengagement from education, employment and planning for the future. This is closely related to unstable or traumatic home lives and associated parenting factors. (See sub section below).

Downey (2007) outlines how trauma can impinge on the ability of young people to learn at school, as shown in the box below.

#### The Impact of Trauma on Learning

- *Affect dysregulation*—making children hyperaroused or dissociated
- *Shame*—which can produce overwhelming affect dysregulation
- *Reduced cognitive capacity*—due to early deprivation and/or affect dysregulation
- *Difficulties with memory*—making learning harder
- *Language delays*—reducing capacity for listening, understanding and expressing
- *Need for control*—causing conflict with teachers and other students
- *Attachment difficulties*—making attachment to school problematic
- *Poor peer relationships*—making school an unpleasant experience
- *Unstable living situation*—reducing learning, and capacity to engage with a new school

Source: Downey, L. (2007) *Calmer classrooms: A guide to working with traumatised children*. Melbourne: Child Safety Commissioner.

Measures to address such issues, as cited or suggested in the literature largely seek to address personal difficulties in the young person’s life that affect development and ability to navigate everyday life and its demands, for example:

- Counselling assistance (NMIT, 2010)
- Welfare and personal development assistance (NMIT, 2010)
- Conflict management workshops (NMIT, 2010)
- Agencies helping with ‘difficult cases’ (Drummond, 2010)
- Case management to help retain students in education and training and promote successful transitions to further study and work (DETYA, 2001; as cited by DEECD, 2008, p. 25).
- Supporting, empathic and structured approach (Downey, 2007).
- Strategies that include:
  - mentoring;
  - co-ordinated welfare programs to improve social skills;
  - tutoring;
  - targeted financial support; and
  - an intensive continuum of case management (DEECD, 2008). (Also see DEECD suggestions below under following headings: ‘home life...’ and ‘school...’).

Deur (2011) outlines optimal practices for supporting young people with an emotional disturbance as documented in the literature. (See Attachment One for a full list of references used by Deur). As outlined in the box below, these can be categorised according to the dimensions of: strength-based approaches, individually tailored responses and integrated support systems.

<b>Service approaches that emphasise youth empowerment &amp; strengths</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on self-determination</li> <li>• Strengths based approach</li> <li>• Youth-directed planning of support services post-school</li> </ul>
<b>Tailored responses for young people with troubled histories</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individualised services within a community coordinated support system</li> <li>• One on one intensive case management</li> <li>• Continuity of support</li> <li>• Support to break cycles of poverty</li> </ul>
<b>Systemic approaches encompassing the above &amp; calling for optimal integration of service provision</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systematic transition planning beginning in middle school years</li> <li>• Education system coordination with community services</li> <li>• Policies supporting transition to mainstream society</li> <li>• Identified alternatives to support troubled youth</li> </ul>

## Home Life & Parenting

Perhaps not surprisingly, home life and parenting emerge as central factors in the aetiology of youth disengagement from education and training. Specifically, many studies identify parental neglect and abuse and domestic conflict and trauma as being implicated in the disengagement of young people from the mainstream education system and ongoing career planning. In addition, many young people are disengaged from school because of family carer responsibilities, with some becoming parents at an early age.

Related to ‘social disadvantage’ below, having parents with low education and/or little interest in academic achievement (and, perhaps, being long term unemployed) also tends to translate into a lack of personal support for young people to develop their own education and training pathways.

Measures to address these factors, as cited or suggested in the research literature, include:

- family work and family involvement (NMIT, 2010);
- parent support programs (NMIT, 2010);
- agencies assisting schools to address student well-being, specifically by working with families to resolve problems e.g. through parent education (Drummond, 2010);
- development of resources to support parents in providing their children with clear career advice and guidance and with translation into other languages (HWLLEN, 2011); and
- strategies that include co-ordinated welfare, family outreach and an intensive continuum of case management (DEECD, 2008). (Also see DEECD suggestions above under ‘personal’).

*‘A strong attachment to their school can provide a child with stability in an otherwise unstable world: offering relationships, maintaining friendships, providing positive and enjoyable learning opportunities and ultimately building resilience and hope’*  
(Downey, 2007, p. 28).

## School Environment

The *school environment* is centrally implicated in youth disengagement, specifically bullying (by self or others), conflict with teachers, social setting experienced as negative,

lack of adequate or appropriate teaching – especially to address individual educational needs and poor transition arrangements between primary and secondary schools.

Furthermore, disengagement of young people from mainstream education is apparently occurring earlier (Drummond, 2010). Many of the most difficult children and young people in the education system have left or been expelled by ages 12 to 14, and either continue without access to education or are educated in alternative settings (Downey, 2007).

Measures to address these issues, as cited or suggested in the research literature, are outlined in the box below, according to main categories of: early intervention, individually tailored approaches, nurturing relationships, extra transition/career planning assistance and alternative education programs.

<b>Earlier intervention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Earlier intervention, while children are in primary school, to prevent later disengagement or to lessen its impact (Drummond, 2010)</li> <li>• Alternative schools that focus on youth aged 12 to 14 (NMIT, 2010)</li> <li>• Strategies that include early intensive pathways and careers planning, career guidance, tutoring and assistance for skill development among low achievers (DEECD, 2008).</li> </ul> <p><i>Also see DEECD suggestions under 'personal' and 'home life...' above).</i></p>
<b>Individually tailored approaches</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual/ small group tuition (NMIT, 2010)</li> <li>• Individual learning plans inside and outside school (DEECD, 2006)</li> <li>• Student centred programs (DEECD, 2006)</li> <li>• Longer term teacher unit programs (NMIT, 2010)</li> <li>• Case management approaches (DEECD, 2006)</li> </ul>
<b>Nurturing relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship-based approach to teaching traumatised and/ or neglected children, rather than behaviour management strategies (Downey, 2007)</li> <li>• A generally non-punitive approach (DEECD, 2006)</li> <li>• Student support groups (DEECD, 2006)</li> </ul>
<b>Extra assistance for transition &amp; career plans</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transitional programs/ planning (NMIT, 2010; DEECD, 2006)</li> <li>• Agencies providing career planning assistance to schools (Drummond, 2010)</li> </ul>
<b>Alternatives to mainstream, 'academic; education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alternative schools that focus on enhancing social skills, student self esteem and personal growth (NMIT, 2010)</li> <li>• Hand on studies, focus on trades, outdoor recreation, becoming job ready (NMIT, 2010)</li> <li>• Programs that link learning of alternative schools to mainstream schools (NMIT, 2010)</li> </ul>

## Social Disadvantage

*Social factors* that have been implicated in youth disengagement include: low socio-economic status, living in neighbourhoods of high poverty, having parents with low education and little interest in academic achievement, being from an Indigenous, CALD or refugee background, experiencing social dislocation, being from a non-nuclear family and living in a rural or regional area.

Perhaps because ‘social disadvantage’ relates to broader structural and systemic factors, there is less specific and detailed reference to addressing this dimension in the youth engagement research literature. At the same time, some suggested measures for personal, family and school support (above) and the service system (below) aim to counter (i.e. correct if not prevent) the effects of social disadvantage. In addition, there have been local programs to remedy social and structural inequity for families with children for some time now, for example the Brotherhood of St Lawrence’s Family Centre Project of the 1970s (<http://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/site/page.cfm?u=9>) and the Smith Family’s current Learning for Life program (<http://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/site/page.cfm?u=9>).

### Services & Service System *(in addition to family/parent programs, above)*

Inadequacy of the *service system* has also been implicated in ongoing youth disengagement, namely lack of service support and poor coordination of services as well as a lack of adequate transport in some areas.

Measures to address these, as cited or suggested in the research literature, are outlined in the box below according to the themes:

- early intervention and support for younger people;
- facilitation of community connection and positive role modelling;
- skill development and drug and alcohol support; and
- service mutual support and collaboration, especially between schools and community service organisations.

*(Also see various relevant proposals above under ‘personal’).*

<b>Early intervention &amp; outreach &amp; support for younger people</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Early intervention, outreach services (NMIT, 2010)</li><li>• Engagement programs tailored for youth aged 10 to 14 that aim to re-integrate participants into formal education, training or employment (NMIT, 2010)</li><li>• Services for youth aged 12 to 15 referred by the Juvenile Justice system to assist them with re-engagement to learning or training (NMIT, 2010)</li></ul>
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<b>Opportunities for positive feedback &amp; role modelling</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programs that allow interaction with positive role models and peer groups (NMIT, 2010)</li> </ul>
<b>Community connection – activities &amp; community service/ involvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessible and affordable range of broader cultural, recreational, sporting and community service activities to promote community participation and transition to independence, along with varied learning and leadership opportunities (YPAPT, 2001)</li> </ul>
<b>Skill development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities to develop literacy, numeracy and communication skills (YPAPT, 2001)</li> </ul>
<b>Drug &amp; alcohol support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drug and alcohol prevention programs (NMIT, 2010) <i>(NB: to which might be added support for mental health issues and early intervention for those with a dual diagnosis).</i></li> </ul>
<b>School &amp; service collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agencies working with schools, perhaps playing a brokerage role, toward collaborative problem solving and the development of relationships that have continuity and longevity (Drummond, 2010)</li> <li>• Agencies sharing information with schools relating to the well-being of students and advocating for them (Drummond, 2010)</li> <li>• Agencies assisting schools to address student well-being, specifically by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Running programs on topical issues like binge-drinking</li> <li>○ Helping with 'difficult cases'</li> <li>○ Career planning assistance</li> <li>○ Working with families to resolve problems e.g. parent education (Drummond, 2010)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Development of collaborative relationships between local stakeholders to increase pathway options and improve transition outcomes for young people e.g. Whittlesea Youth Commitment (HWLLEN, 2011)</li> <li>• Systems, care team approach whereby the network of teachers, workers and carers surrounding traumatised children have forums to meet in, and processes for reflection and collectively managing the inevitable anxieties these children arouse. (Downey, 2007, p. 27).</li> <li>• Advocacy services for young people (NMIT, 2010)</li> <li>• Lessons from UK program, 'Changemakers' include community service and involvement activities; and collaboration between schools, community agencies, cultural, recreational and sporting body partnerships to facilitate participation in programs for effective transitions (Deur, 2011).</li> </ul>

## Youth Program Design

Of particular relevance for this project, some additional learnings and ideas for programs for disengaged youth, are outlined below. (Also see Attachment Two for additional information). These encompass a holistic approach, focusing on personal development,

relationships, assistance with obstacles, effective staffing, experiential learning, and continuity of support.

<p><b>Holistic, multi-faceted approach</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holistic and multi-faceted service provision for disengaged youth addressing multiple aspects of youth circumstances, including family, community, schools and job training programs; with services to include counselling, child-care and transport assistance (Fernandes &amp; Gabe, 2009; as cited by Deur, 2011) (<i>US study</i>)</li> <li>• Effective staff and leadership, holistic approaches to multiple &amp; individual needs, experiential learning opportunities, self-paced curricula and a focus on developing youth's leadership skills (Fernandes and Gabe, 2009; as cited by Deur, 2011)</li> <li>• 'Youth Development Programs' that expand youth horizons and improve at least one context e.g. home, school or community, with activities that are real and challenging, build skills, broaden horizons and increase developmental supports. These may include: field trips, cultural activities, community services, employment opportunities and recreation and mentors to expand youth horizons (Roth &amp; Brooks-Gunn, 2003; as cited by Deur, 2011) (<i>US study</i>)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Focus on relationships with others, family &amp; community</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitation of connectedness and trust (DEECD, 2008).</li> <li>• Effective staff and leadership and a focus on developing youth's leadership skills (Fernandes and Gabe, 2009; as cited by Deur, 2011)</li> <li>• 'Youth Development Programs' that expand youth horizons and improve at least one context e.g. home, school or community (Roth &amp; Brooks-Gunn, 2003; as cited by Deur, 2011)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Addressing poor achievement &amp; personal obstacles</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of tasks with tangible results that address poor achievement and personal obstacles (DEECD, 2008)</li> <li>• Services to include counselling, child-care and transport assistance for education and workforce preparation (Fernandes &amp; Gabe, 2009; as cited by Deur, 2011)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Programs with effective staff &amp; leadership</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective staff and leadership (Fernandes and Gabe, 2009; as cited by Deur, 2011)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Experiential, hands-on and self-paced learning opportunities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programs that have experiential learning opportunities and self-paced curricula (Fernandes and Gabe, 2009; as cited by Deur, 2011)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Activities that are real &amp; help with development</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of tasks with tangible results that allow for diverse needs and address poor achievement and personal obstacles (DEECD, 2008)</li> <li>• Activities that are real and challenging, build skills, broaden horizons and increase developmental supports. (Roth &amp; Brooks-Gunn, 2003; as cited by Deur, 2011)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Continuity of support</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program continuity, as continuity and follow up access to creative activities has positive impacts in long term skill development, while sporadic access has negative impacts for disadvantaged young people (de Roeper, 2009; as cited by Deur, 2011)</li> </ul>

Even more ‘closer to home’, some learnings from local programs to re-engage disconnected youth are included in the box below.

#### **LOCAL LEARNINGS**

Continuum of care within a case management framework – according to Deur (2011) a good model is individualised, innovative and driven by the needs of young people. It includes:

- Whole community approach
- Identification of barriers and a tailored transition plan
- Group work
- Problem solving
- Focus on motivation and skills building and provision of counselling
- Mentoring and advocacy
- Mediation and assistance with employment opportunities
- Referral to specialist services
- Support with numeracy, literacy and quality teaching

Lessons from the success of the local program ‘Moving Forward’ include:

- Short days
- Group work
- Creation of community links
- Empowerment and exposure to opportunities
- Links to other educational opportunities on completion

Lessons from the success of REV (Returning to Education and/ or Vocation program) include:

- Group work to address anxiety
- Capitalising on motivation of those contemplating change
- Activities base
- Mix of personal, social and vocational skills and learning
- Assistance to find a place in an appropriate new school
- Ongoing outreach for those who are not ready for new school after eight weeks
- Monitoring during and after completion of the program

## **Conclusion**

The main points from the relevant research literature on support for disengaged young people, as documented in this section and in Attachment One, have been used to orient consultations as covered in the following section. Key points from both the literature and consultations carried out for this study are used to inform key parameters for the design of a brief program to re-engage young people in training, education or occupational planning in Section Four.



### 3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM CONSULTATIONS

In this section an overview of findings from consultations carried out for this study is provided.

#### Methodology

In-depth interviews and focus groups were carried out, using a semi-structured interview schedule based on variations of the questions below, as adapted to the roles of those consulted. Participants were assured of confidentiality and, specifically, that their name would not be recorded with anything they said. At the same time participants were advised that occasionally they might be identifiable due to their unique role in the local area and that they should advise the researcher if there was anything they would like to be ‘off the record’. (None saw reason to take up this offer).

#### Interview Guide

- 1 Please describe your program and your role
- 2 What are the main issues that young disengaged people present with?
- 3 What activities and programs have you provided to help young people transition to training or education?
- 4 What ones have been successful?
  - *Why do you think they have been successful? (Possible prompt: What have been key factors?)*
  - *Do you have data or documentation of this success? e.g. how many young people have sustained education since the program or activity.*
- 5 What programs or activities have not been successful?
  - *Why do you think they have not been successful? (Possible prompts: What have been key factors including participant characteristics and program activities)*
- 6 What are the main issues or barriers that need to be addressed in programs to assist young people transition to education or training?
- 7 What are young people saying or indicating would be helpful in assisting them to transition to training or education?
- 8 What would you suggest for future programs or activities to assist disengaged young people in returning to education or training? *(Possible prompt: what would be key dimensions of programs or activities?)*
- 9 How could your agency’s strengths & resources be used to form part of a response to the needs of disengaged young people? *(Prompt e.g. for an 8 week program).*
- 10 Is there anything you would like to say that I haven’t asked you about? *(Give card and invite to send any more thoughts by email. Ask if they would like transcript sent to them for review/editing)*

Discussions with the young people from the Pavilion and the focus group with the project's steering group were more open and self-directed.

Detail of the consultation sample are provided in the table below

	<b>Role of Those Consulted</b>	<b>Mode of Consultation</b>	<b>No. consulted</b>
1	Mission Australia Trainer/Facilitator Learning Unlimited - Mission Australia	Interview <i>(in person)</i>	1
2	RMIT – Whittlesea Youth Connections & local LLEN	Interview <i>(in person)</i>	2
3	NMIT staff including: Contract management for Type 3 & 4 activities, service delivery Types 1,2 & 3 and monitoring & trouble shooting, VCAL programs, youth unit.	Group interview <i>(in person)</i>	3
4	Parent of a disengaged young person <i>(Referred by Kildonan Youth Case Work Coordinator)</i>	Interview <i>(by phone)</i>	1
5	Students at The Pavilion	Group interview <i>(in person)</i>	3
6	Social Worker & Principal at The Pavilion	Interview <i>(in person)</i>	2
7	Members of local youth support network, in various roles <i>(See introduction for members of project steering group)</i>	Focus group <i>(in person)</i>	10 altogether - with 4 of these previously interviewed
8	Teacher at The Pavilion	Interview <i>(by phone)</i>	1
9	School-based Transition Brokers	Group interview <i>(in person)</i>	3
<b>TOTAL CONSULTED</b>			<b>22</b>

## Findings

### Issues & Challenges

Similar to the literature findings, issues that disengaged young people were said to experience related to the overlapping dimensions of: personal factors, home life and

parenting, school environment, socio-economic dimensions and service system barriers. These are outlined in more detail below.

### *Personal*

Many disengaged young people have a history of not feeling safe and secure in their home environment and have associated trust and attachment difficulties. This may result in socio-emotional developmental delay, poor life skills and dysfunctional ways of dealing with emotions. Alcohol and drug use (which may be inter-generational) and mental health problems (diagnosed or undiagnosed), such as anxiety, may also contribute to school and social marginalisation. Common impediments to educational inclusion, in particular, are low levels of literacy and numeracy and/or learning disabilities.

Criminal activity was also mentioned as a factor in youth disengagement.

### *Home Life & Parenting*

In particular, many focused on unstructured, neglectful and/or abusive aspects of young people's home lives including unsupportive and unstable family environments, 'broken homes', Child Protection involvement, parents who are emotionally and practically absent, dysfunctional or conflictual ways of dealing with strong emotions and, in general, a lack of supportive and attentive oversight by parents. Abnormal sleeping patterns for many young people, who were apparently staying up all night and playing computer games and/or on the Internet, was associated with a lack of supervision by parents. Some parents were also said to place a low value on education and were disinterested in their children's regular school attendance. Linked with this, carer responsibilities were said to be impeding the education trajectories of many young people, although this might not be evident without some investigation or probing.

Other home life factors impinging on youth engagement in education or training were homelessness/ transience and young parenthood.

### *School Environment*

Factors relating to mainstream school environments were also raised. As well as 'school refusal' by young people, some schools were also said to present barriers to the inclusion of students who had been troublesome in the past (referred to as 'student refusal' here). This suggests that some schools may need greater resources and/or a different approach for the education of young people who have problems fitting into mainstream education.

Another school-related issue raised by those consulted was the unsuitability of curricula for some young people, ostensibly lacking requisite breadth to suit a range of interests and being overly academic at higher levels. Several felt that there is a substantial leap in

the academic standard required between years 10 and 11 such that that struggling students can no longer manage and are forced to disengage from formal education. Consistent with this, young people felt that subjects were too theoretical, there was too much discipline and overly long days in mainstream schools.

Rather than being disinterested, some parents apparently have unrealistically high expectations of their children who are not achieving academically and who may be interested in more practical, 'hands on' avenues of vocational development. These young people may become disinterested in school because they are bored, they have failed or they just find the work too difficult. With weak numeracy and literacy skills they may 'play up' in class or not attend and thus fall further behind in their work. Other struggling students may still attend regularly although they behave disruptively, because they feel safer at school than at home. In addition, when they have a difficult home life student's concentration may be poor, impeding their ability to learn and achieve at school.

Others spoke about a detrimental emotional climate at school, with bullying being a problem, (those leaving being either perpetrators or victims) and a perception of young interviewees that teachers had not genuinely cared about them and lacked 'love' in their approach.

A growing problem was said to be the number of students under the age of 15 who are leaving the school system, with disconnection often starting younger in primary school. This was associated with a lack of alternative educational programs for this cohort i.e. those under 15 years old who leave the mainstream school system. One specified that there is a lack of programs that are not based on school outcomes for people under 16.

Moreover, some early school leavers were thought to be 'slipping through the cracks', for example if they are younger than 15, if parents are away – overseas or interstate, if parents separate and one moves and/or if the home phone is disconnected. One said that disconnected girls are more likely to go unnoticed than boys who leave school prematurely.

### *Socio-economic Dimensions*

As noted above under 'home life and parenting', particular socio-economic dimensions implicated in youth disengagement were low socio-economic status and inter-generational unemployment and education disengagement.

### *Service System Barriers*

In relation to the service system for young disengaged people, in general, there was said to be a lack of venues that are youth oriented and youth friendly and a need for better connections between relevant organisations to meet the needs of young people in the area, specifically better capitalisation of the programs that do exist through referrals.

A particular point was the immediacy of young people's expectations i.e. when young people decide on an avenue for training or education they tend to want it immediately and do not always understand that they have to wait a year (for example). Such delay may thus have a detrimental impact on their ongoing motivation and participation in the life of the community.

Program barriers in meeting the needs and aspirations of young disengaged people included large student groups and excluding eligibility criteria. One pointed out that it is difficult to be innovative in program design and delivery when there is a pressure to prove successful results only. In other words, programs cannot necessarily be creative and innovative, while still being predictably successful.

#### QUOTES ABOUT ISSUES & CHALLENGES FOR DISENGAGED YOUTH

##### **Motivation & place in the world**

Building motivation – some kids do not have a sense of the future, no role models and spaces, not exposed to what life might be. They don't have motivation, a sense of self and where they are situated in the world. This is learning they are not exposed to at school.

##### **Trust & attachment**

Trust and attachment issues; feeling safe and secure in an educational environment. Their primary educational experience has been mostly failure and exclusion. The primary goal at the beginning is to provide a welcoming space. Students are aware of their boundaries; there will be no exclusion (and there will be) unconditional positive regard. Most who present are resistant to learning. There is an emphasis on building positive relationships with us. This takes months. I never show anything except unconditional positive regard. They develop trust. Young people then want to protect the relationship (because they value it). When they feel safe in the space, with an attachment to the teacher they behave in a certain way.

##### **Learning disabilities**

Learning disabilities – not major, but some have been let go through (the school system). There is an assumption that all kids have competence in literacy but not all read. Young people are very phone literate, but not necessarily with computers if they have no computer at home. They are good with navigating the Internet and social networking.

The (school) system is very slow, very easy (but) after Year 10 it is very hard. If have them after year 10 nothing is very soft. That's why children leave. They run away. It is no good. That's why the education system is not good for years 11 and 12. (*parent*)

##### **Student refusal** (*refusal of students by schools*)

Some don't want to do VCE. Schools can push up (students who are not performing). If there is not VCAL then they are sunk. There is a big leap between years 10 and 11. Schools do not necessarily want under-performing students (and may encourage them to leave before they reach VCE years). If there is no VCAL, they (schools) position themselves for VCE. It is subtle. (*Another interviewee responds*) it is not so subtle – like a sledge hammer thing; not a one-off thing. One school had exit interviews for year 10s. Schools are under a lot of pressure to perform well. They get mixed messages from the Department.

##### **Ongoing disconnection from school**

If the school has asked them to leave it is hard for them to come back. Sometimes the school says they are full (creating justification for not accepting them back). Some (students) don't want to see each other. There are peer issues (as they) all know each other – in Lalor and Epping ... so they won't go (to certain schools).

### **Mental health**

Mental health is a big issue. Over and over again (it appears in) case notes... Individuals need early intervention before a crisis calls for diagnosis. The trend is not to label; more early intervention so it doesn't (escalate). The focus is on wellness and well-being.

Depression and anxiety - and then self medication. Using medication for anxiety can have a disastrous result. If they have the propensity it can tip them over. (Mental health problems are indicated by) change in the way they are behaving; regression – (they are) not interested in anything. I get calls... that a young kid wouldn't get out of bed one year ago, but now has (because of a program). If there is a change or swing something is going on (such as) anger or withdrawal. There can be undiagnosed anxiety... often kids tell their friends, but if they are cut off (they don't tell anyone).

### **Transience**

Some have no permanent house. They are couch surfing; staying with friends' families.

*Young people were asked about **reasons behind disengagement from mainstream schools**. Responses included:*

*Interviewee 'C': Bullying, depression, home life, too much discipline. The structure of mainstream is shit. It's a lot of THEORY. I feel like I missed lots of work'*

*Interviewee 'B' 'Teachers don't love you. Bloody high school, they don't help!'*

*They were also asked if more could be done to help young people stay at school.*

*Interviewee 'B': They should be encouraged to go to school, schools should have better teachers and school time should be lessened...*

## **Characteristics of Successful Programs**

Participants were asked about successful programs they knew to re-engage disconnected young people and the factors that they know played a role in this success.

Factors leading to the success of various programs were again associated with the interconnected dimensions of personal, family, learning/training and broader social connection. The points raised are arranged under such headings below in addition to a final category: 'course design'.

### *Personal Care & Affirmation*

Many said that young people need to feel that program staff care about them. They recommended an individualised nurturing approach, with a high level of engagement by the worker, in particular before the course starts. In this vein, support, personal attention and mentoring were suggested, with young people emphasising the importance of 'love'.

Consistent with this, recruitment of high quality support staff was seen as crucial i.e. workers with exceptional personal skills and dedication in working with young people and a good understanding of youth issues relating to a history of neglect and/or abuse.

One highlighted the importance of patience when dealing with young people with low literacy and numeracy skills, saying ‘*sometimes you need to go over the same information a few times ...*’

Another said it was important to genuinely listen to what young people say, even while ‘*putting the ball back in their court*’.

Other elements of a nurturing supportive approach were said to include:

- Appreciative, affirming, strength-based approach;
- Focus on relationships between young peers and with adult mentors and role models, enabled by opportunities and small groups wherein trusting relationships can be formed; and
- Continuity of support enabled by ongoing resourcing for services.

In terms of content, suggestions included: attention to body image issues for both males and females (though not in same group), preparation of food by/for young people in the context of a nurturing approach and provision of clothing for young people if needed.

### *Parent Involvement*

Frequent mention was made of the importance of parent involvement and parent support. Several suggested that opportunities be provided for parents to be involved in their children’s education and to be better informed so that they can provide appropriate support and direction to their children, for example rather than dictating their own academic aspirations that may be unrealistic.

Others also noted that young disengaged people often have parents who are not able to truly care for them for a variety of reasons.

### *Learning & Training*

A range of learning and training dimensions were nominated as factors in successful programs for disengaged youth.

The importance of individualised assistance to develop learning skills and overcome barriers such as low literacy and numeracy was frequently emphasised. In addition to ‘one-on-one, tailored support’ the development of individual learning plans was highlighted as a success factor in successful programs.

In addition, an adult learning approach, no matter the age of the young person, was seen as most effective and this was certainly the view of the young people themselves. Within this approach young people are given responsibility and feel respected.

In terms of general content, successful programs were said to include: relevant and motivating skills-based activities (such as obtaining a driving license), emphasis on experiential learning (perhaps including work experience), assistance with day-to-day life skills and support to improve literacy and numeracy. Successful programs have apparently also included visual art activities e.g. involving art on a large canvas and graffiti.

Exposure to occupational possibilities also emerged as being important as well as linking young people to apprenticeships and license courses and to a range of other organisations as required such as TAFE and Centrelink.

Particular learning and motivation activities that were highlighted as success stories included:

- School-based activities and alternative courses
  - School Focused Youth Services (SFYS)<sup>3</sup>  
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/sfyouthservices/>
  - Flexible courses that are tailored by each school for student needs and aspirations, in partnership with community organisation/s (e.g. ‘Finding My Place’ that is a collaboration between schools and local libraries)
- Vocational ‘tasters’
  - Programs that provide information and exposure to different industries (e.g. WYC/ LLEN Making Choices brunch and work experience program)
  - Vocational tasters and experience that broaden student horizons and give them inspiration and focus for their future e.g. ‘Worlds of Work’, Foundation for Young Australians as utilised by the Pavilion.

### *Social Connection*

- Contact with possible role models for continuing education or training
- Exposure to vocational ideas and possibilities
- Linking of young people to other organisations
- Looking after both extrinsic (environmental) and intrinsic (personal) needs
- Involvement in community projects wherein young people can feel valued and be recognised for their contribution

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<sup>3</sup> SFYS provides support to schools and agencies and provides funding opportunities for schools and agencies to run, in partnership, programs and activities aimed at vulnerable young people.



### *Course Design (other)*

Other factors in successful programs for disengaged youth were said to include:

- voluntary attendance and short days;
- attractive, fun and engaging activities e.g. recreation as a ‘draw card’ and art activities;
- incentives and rewards;
- recognition of success through awards, certificates etc; and
- establishment of some sort of routine as a stepping stone to further education or training.

### *Lessons from The Pavilion*

There is evidently a lot to be learnt from The Pavilion’s success in re-engaging disconnected youth, particularly its focus on creating a safe, nurturing and affirming environment and positive, respectful and trusting relationships – between students and with the school staff. (Some evidence of this success can be seen in its long waiting list and high level of engagement with enrolled students). Key dimensions of its service framework are outlined in more detail below, while also reflecting many of the points above.

- A welcoming, safe, secure and nurturing environment
- Clear rules and boundaries that students have some facilitated ownership of (with three main expectations of students – that they will work, be respectful and not disrupt others)
- Time provided for support and cultivating a feeling of security and safety before more demanding activities are attempted
- Teacher approach of unconditional positive regard and a deliberate focus on the trust and safety issues of students
- ‘Calmer classrooms’ approach (Downey, 2007) and utilisation of social work and well-being theories to provide holistic, tailored support
- Strong education program
- Case management and care, including feeding and clothing
- Fostering of strong relationships between workers and young people, including engagement before the beginning of the program
- Employment of highly skilled workers with good support and pay (enhancing continuity in staff and relationships)
- Employment of staff with exceptional group work skills
- Authenticity and clarity in articulating the purpose of classes and activities
- Flexibility and choice for students
- Education program tailored for each student
- Dialectical approach to teaching, wherein the format may be changed mid class if students are not responsive

Some research participants cited particular programs as being successful and outlined the ingredients they thought had led to this success. This information is outlined in the table below (complementing additional information in Attachment Two).

Successful Programs	Comments about Successful Factors
Op New Start (has financial literacy) Moving Forward Pavilion Brunswick Youth Services VCAL – Epping (has financial literacy) Ignition (focus on low literacy) TAG Whittlesea Community Connections – basic car maintenance, L to P program (car maintenance attracts males, learning to drive attracts could both males and females) Salvos Life skills	Strong relationships Skills based and relevant to what they want Have to have the right person; person was hand picked for the Taster program. Need respect, tolerance, flexibility and calmness. Feeding young people (e.g.) breakfast club for VCAL. Students help prepare it (at NMIT). Financial literacy – a lot of kids have financial difficulty (e.g. compounded by) transit fines. Not having money is a reason they don't turn up. Some kids can't afford lunch. It is quite common. (Staff have given kids money for their lunch). Some kids are engaged to have credit cards.
NMIT vocational taster programs*	6-10 sessions, 1 day per week
Finding My Place*	Motivates young people to stay at school by showing them what is 'out there'. In particular, TAFE exposure is beneficial.
Workplace visiting one day a week	Engaging young people to stay at school a little longer (In one example, a previously unengaged student had noticeably improved his grooming and had an incentive to behave better in class)
VCAL*	Including carpeting, plastering, painting, hospitality (In one example a young person who had been previously disinterested in school had apparently done a '360 degree turn', unlike before going to bed early and also getting up early in the morning).

**QUOTES ABOUT SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS & FACTORS**

... There is a different student-teacher relationship. We can discuss their behavior. Transition Brokers are usually seen as positive, a broker, a ticket out... We see kids four to five times and can build rapport. They don't mind if we ring to check how they are going. It is about trust and genuine care in them and their future. Sometimes this is (experienced) for the first time. Sometimes there is a lot of contact by phone and we can (also) build up relationships with the parents.... Trust builds with parents too... the first five minutes with kids is important (for building rapport).

It is really important to maintain an adult relationship with the student. A lot of programs are pitched at their age. Ours are experienced beyond their years. They need to be fully respected before participating. Don't dumb it down. Talk to them as intelligent decision makers.

... Word of mouth is critical. There are limited options (for disengaged young people). (Alternative programs) have small groups and students can connect with each other. At high school they are lost and no one connects; they are not coping. They love it; someone calls them by their first name. In the main school no one would know their name. At the main school there is no relation or connection... if in a setting where they are recognised the majority will behave well... relationships are the important part.

The last taster that ran was evaluated. Overwhelmingly (participants) said it was fun. (They were involved in learning activities such as engineering, fabrication, hospitality and plastering)...

**From young people:**

- Support for people in need for the problems they have.
- I have a Youth Worker. I connect with her. (We) need workers with experience, to be UNDERSTOOD, workers need to understand kids properly. Why not help people to prepare with recreational stuff... like graffiti?
- Someone who understands you; to be understood.
- They (workers) WANT to help, that's what's different about good workers...they enjoy what they do.
- Opportunities to prepare (for re-entry into school).

**ADDITIONAL QUOTES FROM YOUNG PEOPLE**

*Young people were also asked if they thought the program being designed is a good idea, with the following responses (Different responses of the three interviewees are indicated by A, B and C).*

- A Yes it is a good idea...to keep you occupied.
- B PROGRAMS! How many programs do we need?; we have so many - Edge, Collingwood Alternative School. Why not get all the kids opinions and ask them what they want? It's all about structure; you can have a program, but it's the environment. If you have a positive environment you will go well. We need help in gaining will! We have to do what we want to do. There are so many programs, but do they do what we want?
- A (agrees) So many programs!
- C There are so many choices but we don't know what to do!
- B You need input from young people. Programs don't fail kids; the kids need to have the will. We need encouragement to change. If I was a worker looking at my past... I don't want to be stuck in a rut, you need something that shows people different possibilities... Need a good home environment, look at our parents look at our past, see how they (parents) were raised...programs should be about relationships... love...
- C They (young people) don't like being told what to do. They want someone who respects them. If you have a boss who tells you off will you want to work for them?
- B I need to be able to trust my workers.
- C Family are important support.
- ...
- A Workers are important, they encourage you.
- B An eight week course is not enough.

*Young people also gave the following responses to the question: 'What recreation activities would you want to see in a short course like the one we are designing?'*

- A Fun things are good; they help us to communicate.
- C A great place to be!

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| A | Everyone's smiling, like here, these two teachers are nice (pointing at two staff members). You get food, bus tickets; they call you if you don't come.  |
| B | All programs should be like ours, relaxed.   |
| A | We don't get told what to do. We get to choose what to do. We have rights and they don't treat us like kids.   |
| C | I feel comfortable here. I went to (local secondary school) but left because I was sick. I call them (Pavilion staff) Auntie and Uncle here. They pick us up; they buy us coffee or chips. They notice us... No one fights here. |
| B | Listen to music, media art, history, painting, building, construction... building a table, gym, independent living, learning things that are fun.  |

## Programmatic Issues & Barriers in Engaging Disconnected Youth

### *Program Content & Design*

As evident in the box above, some young people believe that there are already too many short programs and activities for young people and that it is confusing to make sense of them, especially on the basis of pamphlets and flyers. Young interviewees agreed that it is more important to have a nurturing, supportive environment with good relationships, than a wide choice of activities.

Consistent with this, some workers argued against too much emphasis on 'fun' activities. One said if the focus is too recreational it doesn't help young people in their everyday activities and navigation of the world and that there should be opportunities to improve literacy and numeracy (for example).

Another reported that one-off activities have not been successful for engaging disengaged young people and it is more productive to build in continuous contact with a program. One worker also found that it is a challenge when a program combines recreation and skills-based activities as many young people may 'cherry pick' and just attend on recreation days.

One interviewee observed that a few programs cannot address all barriers for disengaged young people and that such an expectation would be unrealistic.

Observations regarding programmatic barriers included: outdoor recreation excursions that can be hazardous and difficult to manage given the inevitable unpredictabilities; *'the more structured activities are, the better'*. Several interviewees also thought that eight weeks duration for a program is a barrier. One said it takes the first four weeks just for the young people to figure each other out!

## *Services & Service Networking*

Getting enough appropriate referrals from other services was raised as a challenge, even when these services had direct input into the program focus and design. In addition, referrals may be inappropriate if referring workers tell participants that attendance is compulsory i.e. programs need to be clearly voluntary and communicated as being so.

One said that it is a challenge to keep school staff engaged in community teams that work to address the issues of disengaged youth.

Another saw a need for Centrelink to demonstrate greater understanding of and empathy with young people and their situations in its operations and communications with them.

## *School Based*

Waiting times for courses was raised by many as an issue, particularly for marginalised youth. For example, young people may wait for courses they are interested in but without knowing when they will start. In the meantime there is a lack of constructive ways to occupy time and a lack of referral options for Type 3 disengagement. This is particularly the case at the beginning of terms 2 and 4. Now (late August) is reportedly a flat time of year and young people have to wait till the next year to get in a course of their choosing. Some may be accepted for a course and stop going to school, but the danger is that they don't eventually go into that course but have already left the school system and may silently disengage from education and training.

In addition, some young people may simply not want assistance, no matter how often this is offered. There is also apparently a lack of incentive for some to attend school once they stop receiving Centrelink payments (and an associated lack of incentive for some parents to supervise their children to attend).

### **Quotes about Barriers to Successful Programs**

Getting appropriate referrals - especially for Life Skills (is a problem). In some instances, young people are forced to come by their worker. When a person is told they have to be there it is a lot more difficult. The program is voluntary. You can't force people to get out of bed. It works against (the program). (*Question - do they then benefit from the program?*) If they stay for the whole program they may make a few friends. This is where the worker's response comes in. Workers need to gauge where the person is and if the young person is ready or willing to participate.

External activities to engage young people that were one off were not successful. The ones that happened over time were more successful...

Some programs that have fallen down have not been marketed well e.g. Life Skills. They have struggled to attract kids. They are not marketed in the right places.

## **Suggestion for Programs to Engage Disengaged Youth**

Those consulted were asked for suggestions for programs to engage disengaged youth. Responses are outlined below – in relation to programs in general and for the specific design of a brief program as part of this project.

### *Suggestions for Programs in General*

#### **Focus & Objectives**

Appropriate program objectives were said to include the following.

- Programs to keep young people in a ‘holding pattern’ so that they don’t slip further back into a state of disengagement
- Provision of tailored assistance to address barriers e.g. transport for young people in outer areas such as Whittlesea
- Activities for personal mastery and fitness
- Activities that create and enhance community connection and a feeling of value through contribution
- Encouragement to return to school, using links with contacts and peers

#### **Support from Service System**

There was a general consensus that continuity of connection is important, with other people and with places. Specifically, it was thought that the service system needs to provide more continuity in support and relationships for disengaged youth and that there should be continuity in access to youth-friendly spaces.

#### **Other Resourcing**

Resourcing to support young people while at school and to re-connect young people who had left was deemed important, specifically:

- Funds to support young people at school for education expenses e.g. excursions, books;
- Use of contacts and peers to encourage young people to return to school; and
- More DEECD support for programs for young disengaged people i.e., Learning Employment Achieving Potential (LEAP)

According to one, the program ideas are already there; they just need support from organisations: *'We are on the right track and we just need to optimise referrals for programs that are already in place'*.

### *Suggestions for a Brief Program for Young Disengaged People*

Those consulted were asked for specific suggestions for a brief program for young people who are disengaged from training, education and employment and who may be on waiting lists for programs such as provided at The Pavilion. Responses are outlined below under the topics: continuity and engagement, personal support and respect, (other) program design features, eligibility and specific content.

#### **Continuity & Engagement**

Development of and continuity in relationships was thought to be of central importance. Ideas to facilitate this included:

- taking time to build rapport; being aware when it is appropriate to be direct in discussing options for the future including possible opportunities and consequences; always finishing interactions on a positive note; and
- individual engagement and support before, during and after the program, including meeting young people before the program to increase their sense of confidence in participating and having a policy of following up young people after they finish the program.

The issue of continuity in relationships has direct implications for the duration of any short course. Some thought that an eight week program is too brief to facilitate engagement. The possibility of repeating eight weeks if a young person is not ready to move on was discussed as was 16 weeks or one term. Some also highlighted that there are times during the school year when it is difficult for a young person to enrol in any program, for example in terms two and four.

The issue of continuity also relates to the linkages with other organisations and training opportunities that may be made during a brief program. Thus the need to connect young people with Job Service Australia (JSA) to facilitate longer term links with training and employment.

#### **Personal Support & Respect**

Not surprisingly, principles of personal support and respect were seen to apply to the design of a brief program for disengaged young people. Points included:

### *Quality of Relationships*

- Personal encouragement and someone to talk to: *‘Sometimes kids just want someone to talk to; someone to listen...’*
- Positive relationships and a supportive, happy and relaxed emotional climate

### *Quality of Staff*

- Workers that can be trusted
- Stable staffing

### *Adult Learning Principles*

- Respectful, adult learning approach whereby students are treated as intelligent decision makers

### *Rules that Require Respect & Responsibility*

- Ensurance that young people respect the program
- Clear rules and boundaries to guide conduct and relationships that students co-design from the first session e.g. through a ‘student/ participant agreement’
- Two-way responsibility in relationships

### *Strength-based & Affirming Approach*

- Identification and acknowledgement of strengths, including praise
- Exploration of what has made young person resilient and integration of this into program delivery

### *Rewards & Incentives*

- Include rewards and highlight achievements: *‘Incentives and food are must’*
- Shorter, smaller programs with opportunities to achieve success e.g. certificates

### *Family Support*

- Recognition of importance of family support and parental involvement

## **Program Design Features (other)**

As outlined below, other program design suggestions were closely related to the above and included (small) group size, the balancing of both structure and flexibility and meaningful activities.



### *Small groups*

- Small group to enable tailored personal support and management of the group to ensure safety, security and enrichment

### *Structure & Flexibility*

- Balancing structure and flexibility in program design with:
  - structure at the beginning and the end, needed for some for reassurance and predictability
  - flexibility in meeting the needs of young people as content (to some extent) will depend on the participants
- Provision of choice for young participants
- Flexibility in working around and making allowances for the personal disruptions to study that students often experience in their lives

### *Meaningful Activities*

- Purposeful (not tokenistic) activities, with authenticity and clarity in communicating this purpose to young people

### **Eligibility**

Proposals for eligibility criteria for a brief program for disengaged youth included:

- inclusiveness of eligibility criteria;
- utilisation of Work Transition brokers and principals;
- entry for those who have already left school; and
- eligibility for 13-19 year olds in line with Youth Connections eligibility.

### **Specific Ideas for Content**

In addition to guiding points and principles above for service design, some of those who were consulted made a range of specific suggestions. These are listed below.

- Numeracy & literacy
  - opportunities to improve numeracy and literacy, embedded within fun recreational activities
- Personal development
  - opportunities to improve self confidence and social skills within fun recreational activities and/or group work
- Expanded awareness of possibilities for the future
  - depending on length i.e. eight weeks or 16, include vocational tasters and career information
  - inspiration from role models and through mentoring opportunities

- Skill certificates
  - cooking
  - barista – making coffee
  - responsible serving of alcohol
  - first Aid certificate (good for CV and may help get a job)
- Personal development & living skills (*as many have only learnt to use the internet and their mobile phone*) e.g.
  - support for banking and filling in forms
  - using the Post Office
  - face-to-face interactions
  - basic survival and living skills
  - using public transport
  - reading a map; leaving the local area!
  - navigation activities that improve numeracy and literacy in a way that is non-threatening and accessible e.g. State Library’s ‘Hoddle Waddle’ and the city-based camp. (*This might include taking photos of the places visited*).
  - resilience
  - budgeting
  - safe sex, relationships, (self/ other) respect and body image
- Community involvement e.g.
  - visit to elderly (*e.g. one worker used to take under 15 y.o. people ‘at risk’ to Meals on Wheels, where they helped serve food and ate lunch afterwards*)
  - work in area of disability
- Physical activity and trust exercises e.g. Tim Forster’s ropes courses
- Experience in organising and serving a meal e.g. to workers in the youth support network. This could include:
  - invitations
  - budgeting
  - shopping
  - food preparation
  - service
- Cross –age tutoring e.g assisting primary age students with:
  - reading and maths
  - assistance in library
  - story time for little kids
  - helping with sports days
- Improving computer skills
  - game design
  - desk top publishing with photos e.g. make an invitation for meal (above)

### Quotes about Program Design

Building *confidence, self esteem and resilience*; helping (young people) to cope and take this step. They show bravado but they are normally scared. They need to know they can learn and (have) physical activity. It is rare for a kid who is disengaged to be doing well at school. Build in physical activity and strength; build resilience and well being. A lot can't afford gym membership. One (program) in Moreland pays for linking with gyms, using Type 3 funds.

*Outdoor activities* (are) really good to build in programs, especially if they have trouble with numeracy and literacy. It is really useful.

*(Reference to community activities done by some VCAL students as part of the Personal Development component):* Kids can say they have been captain of this or that. It gives them a lot of credit. In Wallan some were in the CFA. Lots of things in the community in the way that VCAL helps e.g. carpentry in schools, gardens, play areas, carpentry for a play school cubby house, all sorts of little things. (Important aspects are): grounded in reality, their achievement and good relationships.

They should do something – any course. It is better if they are not going to school. Skills – carpentry, something like that. If a trade it is good if they do not go to school – mechanical, electric, technical, carpentry. You can't force them if the child doesn't want to go to school. If they don't like it you can't force them. I tell everyone. Education is very important. Life for learning. It is better if they are learning. *(Question: Do you think it is good for them to have fun activities in a program to get them to go to school...?)* It is a good idea – activities and learning something. If they stay home it is too hard. Young people have nothing to do. This is a stage – a dangerous stage (not being occupied at school). If they don't regularly, they are sick inside. (Without) company, it is not good then. Work experience is good. Learning something... *(parent)*

### Possible Service Contributions

Research participants were asked about contributions that their organisation or service might be able to make to support a brief program for disengaged young people. Responses are listed briefly below.

#### *Mission Australia*

- Diversity of staff and skills
- Assistance in developing program and delivering curriculum

#### *WYC/ LLEN*

- Work with partners to deliver work experience opportunities
- Peer mentoring

### *NMIT*

- (With more resources/ capacity) follow up young people after getting into training or education

### *Pavilion*

- Referral source
- Well-being team could provide outreach
- Consultation to inform learnings in program

### *Youth Connections*

- Referral and support
- Explore types of funding for program

### *Steering Group*

- Ongoing support and direction for program

### *School-based Transition Brokers*

- Referring young people
- Keeping in touch with young people to ensure continuity of support
- Attending their graduation
- Facilitating connection to activities and training opportunities
- *They could finish off by making us a lunch!*

## **Conclusion**

The main points from consultations for this study, as documented in this section, as well as key points from the relevant research literature covered in the previous section are combined in Section Four to inform key parameters for the design of a brief program for disengaged young people.

## 4 MAIN POINTS FROM THE LITERATURE & CONSULTATIONS TO INFORM BRIEF PROGRAM DESIGN

In this section key ideas and themes to inform a brief program for disengaged youth are outlined, based on literature findings and consultations as documented in previous sections.

### Goals

Be clear about goals as this directs program design and content. Possible goals might be:

- Engage disengaged youth who may be waiting for another program to start or who may not be connected with anything for the moment (appealing activities and reward).
- Assist them in having a routine of attendance and participation in constructive and fun activities.
- Help build their self confidence and connection with other people.
- Help build their basic skills in numeracy and literacy (both written and verbal) while participating in activities.
- Support them in developing everyday living and survival skills.
- Concentrate on personal support and engagement; take time to build rapport and assist young people in identifying and working toward goals.
- Create opportunities for achievement and build in recognition of this, for example through certificate/s.
- Create opportunities to broaden horizons and ideas for the future.

### Program Design Factors

1. *Provide a welcoming, safe and secure space* for young participants where there are clear and agreed on rules and boundaries.
2. *Wrap together learning and recreational activities* e.g. cooking or navigation and map reading activities could enhance literacy and numeracy in a fun and non-threatening way. (Don't be too heavy handed with the learning goals – but do focus on literacy, numeracy, living skills and personal development as well as other learning goals that the group prioritises).

3. **Have some flexibility and choice within a structure** informed by the goals (e.g. above). It may be like a set menu with 2 or 3 choices – so for ‘community involvement’ there could be a few options that participants would have to choose as a group, such as helping with Meals on Wheels or a primary school - mentoring/ classroom (reading) assistance/ sports day. Be willing to adapt and change service delivery and activities with needs and aspirations of the group, within reason and manageability.
4. **Keep the group small as well as safe and secure.** Mainly allow newcomers only up to and including the third week (with some flexibility to include those who are unlikely to disrupt group cohesion). In the first 3 weeks have greater focus on agreement on rules, ice breaking and getting to know each other – after that learning tasks can be more sequential (e.g. for literacy and numeracy, skill development and personal development).
5. **Utilise a respectful adult learning approach** wherein participants are treated as intelligent decision-makers. Maintain authenticity and clarity in communications. Keep the program and activities voluntary.
6. **Build in continuity of relationships and support** through the service network and service collaborations (before, during and after the program). Maintain consistent unconditional positive regard for participants. Model respectful treatment of others, especially when under stress.
7. **Create achievable goals and opportunities** for success and provide incentives and rewards e.g. food, certificates.
8. In sum - have a **holistic, whole person approach** – not just in getting to know the young person and supporting them in their needs and aspirations – but also in the way that the program is designed to integrate a range of interests and developmental goals at the same time. Developmental goals that may be integrated into activities, support and group work should include these areas:
  - a. Confidence in self, others and the world
  - b. Personal development and enhanced social skills
  - c. Connection to others and the community
  - d. Experience of making a contribution (and reciprocity in human relations)
  - e. Exposure to options and role models
  - f. Feeling of having a future
  - g. Living skills
  - h. Learning and literacy
  - i. Rewards and incentives for regular attendance, commitment and other achievements

## Resourcing Considerations

In line with the above priorities, resourcing should cover:

- Generous resourcing of staff time to allow individual one-on-one time with participants – before, during and after program. During the program, students should have access to youth workers on days when activities aren't running – by phone but also, ideally, at an accessible place where a worker will be on certain half/ whole days. Also include generous resourcing of staff to allow for a small group and a small worker-participant ratio.
- Allowance for staff time to maintain links with other service providers for disengaged youth.
- A space for young people to drop in, meet others and have a feeling of belonging.
- Rewards and incentives for young people e.g. for food and 'treats' as well as certificates.
- Generous staff support through skilled supervision, collegiate team discussions and debriefing, so that they may be enabled to provide unconditional positive regard to young people while maintaining a professional standard of practice and their own health and well-being.
- Adequate resourcing to support a range of excursions and recreational and learning opportunities.

## Conclusion

The program principles and parameters laid out above are drawn on for the design of a brief program for disengaged young people in the following section, which forms the focus of this project.

## **5 PROPOSED DESIGN FOR A BRIEF PROGRAM FOR DISENGAGED YOUTH: ‘GOING PLACES’**

In this section the outline of a program design for a brief program for disengaged youth is proposed, based on the research findings and consultation information outlined in previous sections and the professional expertise and experience of the youth team at Kildonan UnitingCare and members of the research project’s steering group.

### **Draft Program Overview**

#### **Program Aim**

The program will aim to engage young people who are disconnected from school, training or employment. It will support young people to participate in activities that are interesting and recreational and that elicit learning i.e. numeracy and literacy. The ultimate goal of this program is to spark momentum and inspire young people to re-engage with school, training or employment.

#### **Program Approach**

The program will take an individualised caring approach to attain achievable goals that will be recognised and rewarded.

#### **Program Details**

##### *Location*

The program will be based at ‘Edge’ located at Plenty Valley Shopping Centre in South Morang. City of Whittlesea Youth Services and a number of other youth support services are based at ‘Edge’. The location is easily accessible by public transport and a popular meeting place for young people.

##### *Transport*

Transport to and from the program will be made available to young people who are otherwise unable to access it.



### *Duration*

The program will run twice a week for a period of eight weeks during the course of a school term, between 11am and 3pm; however times may vary according to program requirements. Young people will be able to commence the program between weeks 1 – 3, after which there will be a cut off point. However, the program will consider later entry in exceptional cases.

## **Program Intake**

### *Eligibility Criteria*

To be eligible for the program, a young person must:

- reside in the City of Whittlesea;
- be aged 13 – 19;
- be disengaged from school; and
- be disengaged from training or employment.

### *Referrals*

Referrals will be taken by the workers who will be facilitating the program to ensure continuity of service.

Workers will conduct an Allocations Meeting on a fortnightly basis to discuss the referrals and assess eligibility.

At the Allocations Meeting, workers will determine who will be allocated the task of engaging the young person prior to their participation in the program.

### *Pre-participation Engagement*

Workers will meet with the young person to:

- introduce themselves & establish rapport;
- discuss the program;
- assess their capacity to participate in the program; and
- discuss their goals and aspirations.

## **Waiting Period**

In the event that a young person is required to wait longer than three weeks they will be provided with regular contact/ support until they can commence the program.

## Program Phases & Content

The program will be divided into three phases, each with its own focus.

*Phase 1* will focus on *Engagement and Group Formation*. The activities will help to build relationships and develop trust, a sense of safety and respect.

*Phase 2* will focus on *Skills and Self Development*. This will include practical activities that will expose young people to opportunities to develop skills, knowledge and resilience in educational, workplace and community environments.

*Phase 3, Pathway Referral and Celebration* will focus on acknowledging achievement and rewards. This will include constructive and fun activities, whilst exploring future pathways.

### Draft Program Outline

Phase & Weeks	Focus	Activities
Phase 1  Weeks 1-3	Engagement & Group Formation	Introduction Session Meal Planning and Cooking Recreational (bowling, go karting, ice-skating) Drumbeat Art Photography
Phase 2  Weeks 4-6	Skills and Self Development	Short Courses (Barista, First Aid, RSA, Food Handling) Ropes Course City Orientation Visit Money Minded AOD Session Sex Education Self Defence Zoo Excursion Industry Experience Coburg Gardens Community Project (nursing home, meals on wheels, projects with local schools, RSPCA) Meal Planning and Cooking

Phase 3  Weeks 7-8	Pathway Referral and Celebration	Meal Planning and Cooking Fishing Charter Kayaking Hiking Surfing Clinic Horse riding Pathway Planning Overnight Camp Final Event Celebration/ Graduation
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### *Program Completion*

Recognition of achievement

Young people who complete the program will receive a certificate of achievement to celebrate their participation.

### *Exit Strategy*

#### **Pathway Referral**

During the course of the program, workers will review the young person's plan for reengagement with them and support their goals and provide referral options, the aim being that they exit the program with a vocational pathway.

### *Re-engagement with the Program*

Upon completion, if participants have not successfully re-enrolled into school or training, or secured employment, there will be an opportunity for them to participate in the program again. This will be assessed on a case by case basis.

### *Agency Policies and Procedures*

Workers will be required to abide by their agencies policies, procedures and code of conduct at all times.

## **Evaluation**

Evaluation of the program should follow action-learning principles, whereby learnings are collected, collated and reflected on for ongoing planning on a regular basis. Crucial to this approach would be the ongoing engagement of the steering group that supported this research project. Specific evaluation activities should include, but not be limited to:

### **Routine**

- 1 Usual data collection on worker and project activity and levels of youth participation. Data to be gathered in monthly reports (or to be consistent with requirements of funding body).
- 2 Routine recording by workers of issues that are implicated in youth engagement/disengagement as raised by young people, other workers and as observed by project staff and raised in supervision meetings. Themes to be gathered in monthly reports.
- 3 Monitoring of waiting lists in the area for programs for young disengaged people.
- 4 Reflection and planning by program staff and by the steering group drawing on 1, 2 and 3 above in regular formal meetings (with documentation of issues and ongoing planning by steering group to be also kept as 'data' for evaluation at intervals – see below).

### **At Intervals**

- 5 Follow up interviews with sample of young participants after exiting course (and interviews with those who didn't engage, where possible).
- 6 Follow up tracking of outcomes for young people (e.g. 6 months, 12 months later).
- 7 Interviews with key members of the local youth support network (perhaps including programs that youth participants have progressed to).
- 8 Review of any recent locally relevant research literature.
- 9 Report integrating data from 1-8 above and making recommendations.

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**ATTACHMENT ONE:  
RESEARCH LITERATURE GRID**



## NEEDS & CHALLENGES

## PROGRAM SUCCESS FACTORS

## REFERENCE (& DESCRIPTION)

<p>Youth Connections consortia members in the Northern region identified that significant numbers of young people under the age of 15 were increasingly disengaging from school and that a lack of support options existed for these young people to re-engage with education. (NMIT, 2010, p. 22).</p> <p>Disengagement is not the result of one single factor but is related to a number of complex, intertwined issues. External research indicates that disengagement is related to three key factors; individual student issues, family problems, and school matters (NMIT, 2010, p. 22).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gaps in literature re disengagement for &lt; 15 yo (disengagement = disconnection of youth (6-17) during years of compulsory education (p. 5)</li> <li>• One local study highlighted that the current regional data collection system is limited and is unable to provide adequate understanding of:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ the extent of youth disengagement</li> <li>○ disengagement risk patterns</li> <li>○ support needs of disengaged children and young people</li> <li>○ effectiveness of response by the education system to disengaged youth and</li> <li>○ opportunities for improvement within the education system in their response to youth disengagement (KPMG for DEECD, 2009; as cited by NMIT, 2010, p. 6).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• There is a small but significant number of young people aged 10-25 years, who, through a combination of their circumstances, stage of development and barriers to participation, are at risk of not achieving positive life outcomes (DHS 2010; as cited by NMIT, 2010, p.6) (<i>Positive pathways for Victoria's vulnerable young people – a policy framework so support vulnerable youth (2010) was prepared by Department of Human Services, Department of Planning and Community Development, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and Victoria Police</i>).</li> <li>• Children and young people are at risk of disengaging from school when their life circumstances, learning experiences and/or behaviours impede learning, reduce school success</li> </ul>	<p>'Generally those who finish school prior to the completion of year 12 for 'positive' reasons, such as taking up a job or gaining an apprenticeship, are more likely to have a successful transition from school than those who finish their education early for 'negative' reasons i.e. leaving because they dislike school'(Curtis &amp; McMillan, 2008; as cited by NMIT, 2010, p. 7).</p> <p>The following list shows areas indicated by local organization survey respondents as gaps in current services to disengaged young people under the age of 15:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• transitional programs</li> <li>• early intervention, outreach services</li> <li>• family work/involvement</li> <li>• drug and alcohol prevention programs</li> <li>• hands on studies, i.e. focus on trades, outdoor recreation, becoming job ready</li> <li>• longer term teaching unit programs</li> <li>• programs that allowed interaction with positive role models and peer groups</li> <li>• a service that could provide advocacy for young people</li> <li>• programs that link learning of alternative schools to mainstream schools, similar to the now defunct Wyndham Learning Community Centre Alternative Setting which assisted young people aged 10-14 who were becoming disengaged from their education with intensive support to encourage connectedness to schooling (Slingshot Youth Self Employment Website, 2005)</li> <li>• alternative schools that focus on youth aged 12-14</li> <li>• engagement programs similar to PRAISE (which has now ceased due to funding), which was a service tailored for youth aged 10-14 with the aim of re-integrating participants into formal education, training or employment (Moger &amp; Lanyon, 2006)</li> <li>• services similar to the Early School Leavers program (ceased due to lack of funding), which worked with youth (12-15 years old) referred by the Juvenile Justice system to assist them with re-engagement with learning/ training (The Salvation Army website, 2010)</li> <li>• parent support programs</li> <li>• counselling assistance</li> <li>• individual/small group tuition</li> <li>• welfare and personal development assistance and</li> </ul>	<p>NMIT (Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE) (2010) <i>Report on educational disengagement of young people U15 in the Northern Region</i>. Melbourne: NMIT.</p> <p>[Author: Eliza Beck, Project Officer, Edited by: Jane McNally, Contract Manager Youth Connections (NMIT)]</p> <p>This project arose from the combined consortia meeting in May 2010 where members identified that across the Northern region there were significant numbers of young people disengaging from education who were under 15 years old and that SDMs were reporting that there were insufficient options/ activities/ programs available to assist with their re-engagement to education.</p> <p>Following the May meeting, Youth Connections met with the 3 Northern LLEN EOs where it was decided the combined consortia should take the issue to Northern Metropolitan Region (NMR) of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) to work towards some systemic changes that would increase re-engagement of under 15s. In order to do this, a more substantial and accurate overview of the current situation was thought necessary which would involve collection and collation of regional data.</p>
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**NEEDS & CHALLENGES**

**PROGRAM SUCCESS FACTORS**

**REFERENCE (& DESCRIPTION)**

<p>and discourage participation (DEECD, 2010, p.7). (<i>Pathways to Re-engagement Through Flexible Learning Options paper published by the Student Wellbeing Division DEECD Melbourne 2010</i>).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other government sources (Department of Human Services, The House of Representatives Standing Committee) have identified the following as school risk factors for Victorian students as;             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• academic failure</li> <li>• homelessness</li> <li>• illiteracy</li> <li>• low socio-economic status</li> <li>• abuse (as perpetrator and/or victim)</li> <li>• family conflict</li> <li>• drug and alcohol abuse and</li> <li>• disability (DHS in Wheatley &amp; Spillane, 2001; as cited by NMIT, 2010, p. 6).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Individuals at risk of disengaging from school prior to completing their education include those:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ from a low socio-economic background</li> <li>○ from a culturally and linguistically diverse background</li> <li>○ from non-nuclear families</li> <li>○ whose parents worked in blue-collar occupations or were not university educated</li> <li>○ who are Indigenous</li> <li>○ from regional areas</li> <li>○ attending government schools</li> <li>○ who are homeless</li> <li>○ who are in care</li> <li>○ in child protection and</li> <li>○ who are juvenile justice clients (Wheatley &amp; Spillane, 2001 &amp; Curtis &amp; McMillan, 2008; as cited by NMIT, 2010, p. 7).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Curtis and McMillan (2008) identified two common reasons given by disengaged youth for leaving school prior to the completion of Year 12. These reasons include:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wanting to enter the workforce or gain an</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• conflict management workshops (NMIT, 2010, p. 13).</li> </ul> <p>Generally alternative schools have more varied curricula than mainstream schools with a focus on enhancing social skills, student self-esteem and personal growth (Children’s Health website, 2010; as cited by NMIT, 2010, p. 14).</p>	
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**NEEDS & CHALLENGES**

**PROGRAM SUCCESS FACTORS**

**REFERENCE (& DESCRIPTION)**

<p>apprenticeship; or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disliking school (NMIT, 2010, p. 7).</li> <li>• Youth Connection case workers reported a number of issues when working with disengaged young people under 15. Answers predominantly referred to factors related to family conflict, behavioural issues and difficulties faced at school and included:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of family support/ family conflict</li> <li>• lack of programs that target under 15 year olds</li> <li>• reluctance from mainstream schools to take on disengaged young people with complex issues</li> <li>• school refusal</li> <li>• drug and alcohol issues</li> <li>• mental health issues</li> <li>• motivational issues/lack of career aspirations</li> <li>• behavioural issues/ anger management issues/physical fighting</li> <li>• involvement with the justice system</li> <li>• socialisation factors</li> <li>• transition from primary to secondary school issues</li> <li>• truancy/ on-attendance</li> <li>• lack of confidence/self-esteem</li> <li>• learning disabilities</li> <li>• low work performance</li> <li>• low literacy/numeracy skills- falling through the gaps in the education system</li> <li>• at school but disconnected with learning; poor behaviour, in danger of expulsion</li> <li>• experience of trauma</li> <li>• school issues- bullying at school (perpetrator or victim), conflict with teachers</li> <li>• cultural issues and</li> <li>• curriculum not stimulating (NMIT, 2010, p. 10).</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ YC case workers reported at Operational Team meetings the difficulties often met when trying to re-engage young people back into schools... schools refused to</li> </ul>		
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**NEEDS & CHALLENGES**

**PROGRAM SUCCESS FACTORS**

**REFERENCE (& DESCRIPTION)**

<p>accept disengaged young people &amp; young people indicating that they do not want to return to a school (NMIT, 2010, p. 10).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other local orgs predominantly reported the following issues commonly related to youth disengagement:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• family conflict</li> <li>• experiences of trauma</li> <li>• mental illness</li> <li>• substance abuse</li> <li>• homelessness</li> <li>• school refusal/ anxiety</li> <li>• issues at school, i.e. bullying, peer pressure, teacher conflict, school not offering broad enough curricular and/ or limited understanding of students from a CALD background;</li> <li>• poor literacy/numeracy skills</li> <li>• behavioural issues</li> <li>• social dislocation</li> <li>• poverty</li> <li>• lack of parental support and</li> <li>• disability (NMIT, 2010, pp. 11,12).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		
<p>Students become disengaged from education for many reasons, including the learning environment not meeting their needs, homelessness, family breakdown, poverty, mental health problems, low self-esteem, previous poor educational experiences, low educational achievement and challenging behaviours (p. 7).</p> <p>Groups at risk of disengagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In out of home care</li> <li>• Koorie</li> <li>• Young offenders</li> <li>• Affected by homelessness</li> <li>• Newly arrived &amp; refugee</li> <li>• Young parents and carers</li> <li>• Affected by disability</li> <li>• Experience mental health problems (p. 8)</li> <li>• <i>Other:</i> boys, those in regional/rural areas &amp; those</li> </ul>	<p>A small number of children and young people require a more <i>flexible</i> learning option either inside or outside the school environment for the purpose of re-engaging in education... (p. 5).</p> <p><i>Monitoring and additional support</i> may be required during all school <i>transition points</i>, including to the post-compulsory years of schooling when many young people disengage from education (p. 7).</p> <p>Re-engagement of young people relies on <i>effective working partnerships</i> between various parties, including the Department, schools, related government agencies, community service organisations, children or young people and their families and carers, training institutions, business and industry and others involved with young people who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging from school (p. 18).</p> <p>One of the challenges cited for the provision of flexible learning options is</p>	<p>DEECD (Department of Education &amp; Early Childhood Development) (2010) <i>Pathways to re-engagement through flexible learning options: a policy direction for consultation</i>. Melbourne: State of Victoria.</p> <p>Aims to describe the role of flexible learning options in responding to student disengagement and to signal proposed directions and components of the flexible learning options policy framework to be established. The purpose of the Directions Paper was to prompt discussion and seek feedback about the characteristics of the flexible</p>

**NEEDS & CHALLENGES**

**PROGRAM SUCCESS FACTORS**

**REFERENCE (& DESCRIPTION)**

<p>changing schools &amp; underperforming more likely to leave school early; (p. 9).</p>	<p><i>‘workforce skills and support’ as:</i>  <i>‘Work with disengaged students can be demanding and requires specialist skills. For example, staff working with disengaged students require knowledge of and the capacity to apply adult learning principles, trauma theory and a range of creative techniques to manage behavioural issues and learning disabilities...’</i> (p. 20).</p> <p>Good practice principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusiveness</li> <li>• Developmentally appropriate responses</li> <li>• Comprehensive, wrap-around (or student-centred) support</li> <li>• Engagement of parents, families and support networks</li> <li>• Flexibility</li> <li>• Timeliness and accessibility</li> <li>• Mentoring relationships</li> <li>• Evidence-based</li> </ul> <p>Key focus areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A skilled workforce</li> <li>• Accountability</li> <li>• Local solutions</li> <li>• Partnerships\Appropriate targeting of resources (p. 23)</li> </ul>	<p>learning options policy framework.</p> <p>Appendix A outlines <u>support services</u>: School Focused Youth Service, Local Learning &amp; Employment Networks, Youth Transition Support Initiative, Student Support Services, 0-18 Health &amp; Wellbeing Service Framework. It also outlines <u>programs &amp; resources</u>: Community VCAL, TAFE, Adult Community Education and Distance Education.</p>
<p>In summary, disengagement takes many forms; it’s starting earlier; parents are primarily to blame; attendance and success at primary school are paramount for continued engagement. It seems that if you can intervene whilst children are at primary school then there may be a chance to prevent disengagement, or at least to lessen its impact. However, if left until secondary school, then the challenge becomes to cure the disengagement, which is a whole lot harder. Issues include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English language skill is a particular issue for local schools</li> <li>• Disengagement seems to be occurring younger (e.g. adolescent behaviours in primary school, most disengaged kids are illiterate)</li> <li>• Poor attendance in primary school set up bad habits for secondary school</li> <li>• Parental disengagement a big problem (e.g. no reason to get up in morning, not taking responsibility for children,</li> </ul>	<p><i>(From previous column)</i> This is where agencies can have a significant role:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Running programs on topical issues like binge-drinking</li> <li>• Helping with ‘difficult cases’</li> <li>• Career planning assistance</li> <li>• Working with families to resolve problems e.g. parent education</li> </ul> <p>Relationships bw schools &amp; agencies are important:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to what schools have to say so they can solve problems together; start small &amp; be willing to experiment; <i>develop relationships that have continuity &amp; longevity</i></li> <li>• Brokering relationships may be a role for agencies</li> <li>• Share information</li> <li>• Schools need action-not talk &amp; agencies have a role as advocates for young people.</li> </ul> <p>The (sub) title ‘Can we go steady?’ in reference to relationships where there</p>	<p>Drummond, S. (City of Whittlesea) (2010) <i>Fighting disengagement: A battle on many fronts</i>. Paper presented at Taking Education Forward in Whittlesea: The Next Step forum at Plenty Ranges Arts &amp; Convention Centre, May 2010.</p>

**NEEDS & CHALLENGES**

**PROGRAM SUCCESS FACTORS**

**REFERENCE (& DESCRIPTION)**

<p>poor parenting skills, not having good role models themselves, not valuing education, bad school experiences themselves, believing school is not worth it, being anti-school).</p> <p>In general, principals recognise that the role of schools today goes beyond teaching curriculum. Schools are faced with the challenge of supporting students in emotional wellbeing as well as, often, basic needs; the support that might reasonably be expected to be provided by families. Many teachers in this municipality spend a lot of class time dealing with behavioural issues before the real learning can begin. This is where agencies can have a significant role... (see next column).</p>	<p>is a form of commitment, a sense of mutual benefit and an intention to stay together for a time. In fact, one principal observed that partnerships between agencies and schools should be like serious relationships:</p> <p><i>'They take time and energy. Like a marriage. They just don't happen. There's not going to be all roses. There are going to be difficulties... A partnership is about shared responsibility.'</i></p>	
<p><i>See profile of region covered by Hume &amp; Whittlesea (p.7) including high number of young new arrivals.</i></p> <p>There is still a significant number of disengaged youth in the region. The Hume Whittlesea Youth Connections tender (2009) stated that the latest Whittlesea youth disengagement rate is 3,000, or 16.9% and in Hume the rate is 2,671, or 11.9% (compared to the Melbourne Statistical Division rate of 7.4%) (p. 8). Youth unemployment is of major concern for the Hume Whittlesea region. The Labour Force Region Data for North Eastern Melbourne (which includes Whittlesea) and the North Western Melbourne region (which includes Hume City) states that <i>Teenage Full-Time Unemployment Rate (15-19 year olds)</i> is 53.5% for the North Western Melbourne region and 21.6% for the <i>North Eastern Melbourne Region</i>. The North Western Melbourne region figure is the highest in Victoria and one of the highest in Australia (Source: ABS Labour Force Survey - 12 months average original data to December 2010) (p. 8).</p> <p>Access Economics (2008: pii) notes that a Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) study (Bond, Thomas et al. 2000) showed that risk factors as associated with <i>poor mental health</i> were overrepresented in the Interface municipalities (p. 8).</p>	<p>Access Economics (2008) noted that interventions that reduce youth disengagement could potentially return <b>23.6</b> times the government's initial investment to society and 7.6 times directly to the government through increased taxation revenues (p. 8).</p> <p>Parental influence is an important factor that can impact on student engagement. Young people want their parents to have clear career advice and guidance. To this end HWLLEN will continue to collaborate on the development of a number of resources, such as <i>Lost in the Careers Maze</i>, the <i>Hume School Leavers' Guide</i>, and the <i>Whittlesea School Leavers' Guide</i>, and put an emphasis on the translation of some materials into Turkish and Arabic (p. 9).</p> <p>HWLLEN coordinate two place-based youth commitments as a strategic response to identified issues such as high youth unemployment and youth disengagement. In Whittlesea, the Whittlesea Youth commitment (WYC), established in 1999, has developed a strong collaborative relationship between stakeholders in the Whittlesea (area) to increase pathway options and improve transition outcomes for young people in Whittlesea (p. 10).</p>	<p>HWLLEN (Hume Whittlesea Local Learning &amp; Employment Network) (2011) <i>Environmental Scan – 2011</i>.</p> <p>This report describes the post compulsory education and training landscape for the local government areas of Hume and Whittlesea. The main purpose of the Environmental Scan is to provide an evidence base for the development of the LLEN Strategic Plan 2010 to 2013.</p>

**NEEDS & CHALLENGES**

**PROGRAM SUCCESS FACTORS**

**REFERENCE (& DESCRIPTION)**

<p>In the annual National Youth Week <i>Young People’s Forum Survey</i> for 2010, young people from Hume were asked to rank the issues that were important to them. <i>Crime and violence, drugs &amp; alcohol ranked as the top three issues with education issues &amp; finishing school ranked as the seventh most important issue (12.5%)</i> for young people in Hume (p. 8).</p> <p>Issues &amp; challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Engagement and Reengagement:</b> The top issue remains disengaged and disconnected young people – who lack the educational qualifications, skills, transport access or motivation to improve their training, or employment opportunities. This is connected to the issue of the high numbers of 15-19 year olds in this region who are not in full-time work or education.</li> <li>• <b>Link with Business and Industry:</b> Engagement of young people depends on <i>broadening available options</i> in the local area, making the environment youth friendly and welcoming. In considering broadening options the challenge is to match available VET subject choices to industry employment opportunities, especially in manufacturing, allied health, transport and distribution and green jobs.</li> <li>• <b>Engaging with 10-12 year olds:</b> The challenge for HWLLEN is to broker transition activities that link to the younger cohort – 10 -12 year olds. Activities with partners such as the Hume Early Years Partnership and the Principals’ Networks across the region will be important in facilitating activities.</li> <li>• <b>Build links with organisations who work with parents and families:</b> Parents and families need support in the area of understanding transition and career education information. The challenge is to empower parents and family to influence the choices of young people. In 2011 the HWLLEN team will place an emphasis on working with careers teachers and other practitioners for the purpose of disseminating relevant information (p. 9).</li> </ul>		
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**NEEDS & CHALLENGES**

**PROGRAM SUCCESS FACTORS**

**REFERENCE (& DESCRIPTION)**

	<p><b>Conclusion</b>                  The vast majority of respondents (88.5%) believe that the benefits of participating in the Whittlesea Youth Commitment exceed or greatly exceed the drawbacks... the survey results demonstrate that the <i>WYC does significantly increase the efficiency of connecting with other organisations who work on young people’s education and transition outcomes</i>. A wide and diverse cross section of organisations gave different perspectives on why they benefitted from involvement of the WYC. The <i>importance of place</i> was emphasised. That meant having a <i>local point of contact</i>, where one could collaborate to solve problems at a local level. The challenges are limitations around time and money; ensuring the WYC is inclusive of youth needs; planning for ways to reenergise and reinvigorate the Youth Commitment; and to ensure all members are empowered to contribute to decision making and have a shared understanding of the aims and objectives of the WYC (p. 8).</p>	<p>Wheeler, L., Baker, G. &amp; Yuksel, C. (2011) <i>Partnership Evaluation of Whittlesea Youth Connection</i>. Melbourne: HWLLEN.</p>
<p><b>Evaluation feedback:</b> Participants were asked about the most pressing issue that was raised by the symposium. The following themes were observed in responses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth disengagement at middle years</li> <li>• Service gaps for disengaged young people</li> <li>• Lack of coordination and integration of services</li> <li>• Parental engagement in their children’s learning (p. 2)</li> </ul> <p><b>Discussion Session 1: Issues/challenges faced by young people</b></p> <p><i>Lack of family support</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents, especially parents from CALD backgrounds, not acknowledging issues and how to deal with them</li> <li>• Parents are challenged in their parenting roles to assist and support their children’s educational and developmental needs.</li> <li>• Isolation from family/extended family</li> <li>• Lack of reinforcement within families</li> <li>• Lack of knowledge of services (both from parental and young persons perspective)- Not engaging with services</li> <li>• Lack of services/programs to engage in alternative education from mainstream</li> </ul> <p><i>Behavioural issues</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health issues (depression and anxiety)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Evaluation feedback:</b> Participants were asked how they could be involved in addressing some of the issues by working together with other schools and organisation to better support young people in their middle years. These themes emerged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early intervention, increased partnerships, communication, collaboration, co-ordination of efforts and resources at every level to support young people, particularly those at risk of being disengaged</li> <li>• Professional development, sharing good practice models and resources, including looking at alternative programs</li> <li>• Increased parental engagement and community awareness</li> </ul> <p><b>Discussion Session 1:</b> Participants were asked: <i>What opportunities can you see to address some of these issues/challenges in a more effective and coordinated way?</i>, with following responses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Real partnerships that engage families – especially at transition points</li> <li>▪ Empower LLEN’s to go into schools</li> <li>▪ Communication, networking and information sharing about funding and programs</li> <li>▪ Partnerships and communication between schools and agencies</li> <li>▪ Schools and community groups working together. Youth Connections- working in schools</li> <li>▪ Development and fostering of focused partnerships</li> </ul>	<p>Whittlesea Youth Commitment (WYC), (2011) <i>Middle Years Symposium Evaluation Report</i>.</p> <p>Middle Years Symposium – <i>Flying along or falling through the cracks?</i>, held on Wednesday, 15 June at the Plenty Ranges Arts &amp; Convention Centre attracted a total of 102 participants from a range of different sectors, including local government, education, health, welfare and community. The symposium was designed for participants to attend either the whole day or for sessions of interest.</p> <p><b>Facilitated Discussion Session 1:</b> to obtain feedback from the participants on the following four questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are some of the issues/challenges you are seeing with young people?</li> </ol>

## NEEDS & CHALLENGES

## PROGRAM SUCCESS FACTORS

## REFERENCE (& DESCRIPTION)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bullying</li> <li>• Aggression between boys both violent and non-violent</li> <li>• Dealing with family conflict/breakdown</li> <li>• Influence of I.T in young people's lives i.e mobile, iPod Facebook</li> <li>• Accessing outside school hours harmful/inappropriate websites</li> <li>• Drug and alcohol often seem normal</li> <li>• Absenteeism/family holidays (3 months)</li> <li>• Religious conflict</li> </ul> <p><i>Lack of engagement</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Truancy school attendance, School refusal (e.g. anxiety). There is no formal process to address truancy and disengagement – who should follow up when there is an issue with truancy/disengagement</li> <li>• Gender and personal identity issues</li> <li>• Learning difficulties</li> <li>• Lack of connection and feeling safe</li> <li>• Self-esteem and self-worth</li> </ul> <p><i>Disengagement</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disengagement from schooling at an earlier age. Searching for employment with no formal qualification and limited schooling</li> <li>• Need to track younger school leavers</li> <li>• Lack of flexibility in education system. One size fits all approach.</li> <li>• Lack of alternative settings/study options for young people at risk</li> <li>• Schools exiting students contributing to disengagement issues. Department of Education</li> <li>• Schools focus on literacy/numeracy results leaving less time for teachers to get to know their students. Hence schools are reluctant to take on disengaged young people. This needs to change</li> <li>• Lack of identification of learning difficulties, early assessment and intervention = Pressure on schools</li> <li>• Shortage of professional support (e.g. psychologist, welfare)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Middle Years Worker position located within councils to facilitate partnerships, event and activities for families</li> <li>▪ Hubs in secondary schools</li> <li>▪ Advocating for resources to decision makers</li> <li>▪ Monitoring of waiting lists in the area for programs for young disengaged people.</li> <li>▪ Professional Development for teachers to identify risk factors</li> <li>▪ Ensuring teachers are able to connect with local networks/programs</li> <li>▪ Build careers into curriculum –goal setting</li> <li>▪ Transition Broker model in Whittlesea</li> <li>▪ Focus on young people, service mapping, research on disengagement, working with schools. Youth service pathways</li> <li>▪ Improving transition between primary and secondary school</li> <li>▪ Integration role to bring together and manage services as opposed to staff having to do a role on top of their workload</li> <li>▪ Programs that are better integrated to curriculum</li> <li>▪ Breakdown isolation of parents of teenagers</li> <li>▪ Social connectedness</li> </ul> <p><i>Facilitated Discussion Session 2: (Parent Advisory Group)</i></p> <p><i>Where are the gaps and synergies?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Parent strategies to deal with normal adolescent behaviour, esp. CALD families</li> <li>▪ How do you help your children with their homework if you're not confident with the content of the homework yourself?</li> <li>▪ No-one is responsible for the transition b/w primary and secondary school – there is no systematic approach to the transition</li> <li>▪ Parents of vulnerable children don't seek help therefore there is no relationship with the parent = no early intervention and a lack of trust in institutions</li> </ul> <p><i>What opportunities exist to address these issues?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A homework club for parents – information on how do you support children doing homework during the middle years</li> <li>▪ Improved communication with parents ('co-design') e.g., community development officers within schools</li> <li>▪ A middle years representative within council</li> <li>▪ Conversations with parents during transition periods e.g. how to provide a good home learning environment; how to deal with</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. What is being done to address these issues?</li> <li>3. Where are the gaps and synergies?</li> <li>4. What opportunities exist to address these issues?</li> </ol> <p><b><i>Facilitated Discussion Session 2:</i></b>  <i>Parent Advisory Group - Primary/Secondary Transition - Exploring the issues for parents during the Middle Years</i></p>
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**NEEDS & CHALLENGES**

**PROGRAM SUCCESS FACTORS**

**REFERENCE (& DESCRIPTION)**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in pedagogy style in primary school and high school</li> <li>• Lack of School/Parent- home relationship</li> <li>• Transition into high school is parent support/not feel welcome; not feel to know teachers – students overwhelmed</li> <li>• Socio-economic challenges (e.g. poverty and homelessness)</li> <li>• Negative social influences</li> <li>• Lack of support and activities. (E.g. finding appropriate programs for disengaged young people especially under 15's)</li> <li>• Disengaged students have low literacy and numeracy issues</li> </ul> <p><b>Facilitated Discussion Session 2:</b></p> <p><i>What are the issues and challenges for young people?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How can parents be involved in secondary education if their children don't want them to be there?</li> <li>▪ The attitude of schools to parent involvement can be a barrier to parents</li> <li>▪ Children who are transitioning from primary to secondary school are often challenging the rules – parents need strategies to deal with 'normal' adolescent behaviour</li> <li>▪ Building resilience in children – how do you do that as a society?</li> <li>▪ Parents and schools are calling out for help but there is a lack of professional support</li> <li>▪ Parents feel disempowered about young people's risk taking – how can schools help to monitor young people's risk taking behaviour?</li> </ul>	<p>issues regarding sleep etc</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Schools become a 'one stop shop' – families feel welcomed</li> <li>▪ Transitions DVD</li> <li>▪ Parental involvement during school camps etc</li> <li>▪ Programs that include parents as a resource</li> <li>▪ How to engage disengaged/disinterested parents:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ explore what the transitions mean for parents</li> <li>○ A face to face meeting with parents</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Schools can either enable or disenable parents interest in their children</li> <li>▪ There's more to education than academic results</li> <li>▪ The transition begins in Grade 5 (i.e. with the earlier onset of puberty).</li> </ul> <p><i>Where to from here?</i></p> <p>All relevant partners will meet early August to discuss which issues or actions can be taken to support young people in their middle years. Some suggested actions from this symposium may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A follow up meeting to organise working groups</li> <li>• A follow up forum focusing on sharing best practice models and areas the symposium missed</li> <li>• Advocating for a Middle Years Worker position within councils</li> <li>• Advocacy for Whittlesea Transition Broker Model for Hume</li> <li>• Advocacy for flexible learning options</li> <li>• Support school/parent/home relationships</li> <li>• Strategies to avoid disengagement at Grade 5 or earlier</li> <li>• Advocate for Hubs model within secondary schools</li> <li>• Advocate for Community Liaison/ Family Support Officer within schools to bridge the gap between parents and school. This person can also coordinate programs and partnerships with agencies.</li> <li>• Advocate for time release of school teachers to attend important network meetings such as HYC and WYC</li> <li>• Advocate for social emotional learning in the school curriculum</li> <li>• Building the capacity of teachers to identify risk factors</li> <li>• Advocating for resources for middle years</li> </ul>	
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**NEEDS & CHALLENGES**

**PROGRAM SUCCESS FACTORS**

**REFERENCE (& DESCRIPTION)**

<p>Sometimes <i>children who have been abused and neglected</i> create disruption and chaos in the classroom. Many will be far behind in their learning, and have problems with their peers. Some may hurt other children, try to hurt teachers, refuse to cooperate, not pay attention, have regular tantrums and generally create disharmony, while others may be silent, withdrawn, inattentive and overly compliant. Children may alternate in confusing ways between these two extremes (p. 17)</p> <p>Most of the examples that follow have been developed for primary age children, and can be adapted for older children and adolescents. This focus on younger children reflects the sad fact that <i>many of the most difficult children and young people in the education system have left or been expelled by age 12–14, and either continue without access to education or are educated in alternative settings</i> (p. 18).</p> <p><b>The impact of trauma on learning</b></p> <p><i>Affect dysregulation</i>—making children hyperaroused or dissociated  <i>Shame</i>—which can produce overwhelming affect dysregulation  <i>Reduced cognitive capacity</i>—due to early deprivation and/or affect dysregulation  <i>Difficulties with memory</i>—making learning harder  <i>Language delays</i>—reducing capacity for listening, understanding and expressing  <i>Need for control</i>—causing conflict with teachers and other students  <i>Attachment difficulties</i>—making attachment to school problematic  <i>Poor peer relationships</i>—making school an unpleasant experience  <i>Unstable living situation</i>—reducing learning, and capacity to engage with a new school (p. 29).</p>	<p><b><i>The relationship-based approach</i></b>          The following ideas for classroom practices are based on the development of a <i>relationship between the teacher and the child</i>. Change for these children will come more easily if the focus is on the relationship, rather than on behaviour management strategies (p. 18).</p> <p><b><i>Classroom practices for dealing with traumatised children</i></b>  <b><i>Understand the child</i></b> Understanding trauma and attachment difficulties brings compassion and empathy; understanding that the child may be developmentally younger than their chronological age will guide teaching practices.  <b><i>Manage your own reactions</i></b> Working with traumatised children can bring strong emotions; staying calm will help the child to calm themselves.  <b><i>I see you need help with ...</i></b> Help children to comply with requests. Because they don't necessarily want to please adults; helping them comply will avoid power battles.  <b><i>Structure and Consistency</i></b> Traumatized children often have little internal structure and need firm boundaries, rules, expectations and consequences—applied with sensitivity and calm.  <b><i>Time in, not time out</i></b> Traumatized children experience time out as yet more rejection, increasing their feelings of shame and worthlessness; time in keeps them engaged in a relationship.  <b><i>Connect</i></b> Dissociative children, who are often quiet and compliant, need gentle and consistent attempts to connect with them.  <b><i>Consequences, not punishment</i></b> Use natural consequences that relate to the problem behaviour and are designed to repair damaged property or damaged relationships.  <b><i>Structure choices to remain in control</i></b> Offer choices with humour and creativity to avoid power battles; keep the child responding to you rather than allowing them to control the interaction.  <b><i>Acknowledge good decisions and choices</i></b> Traumatized children often don't respond well to praise, but still need positive reinforcement for doing something well: comment on the job well done rather than intrinsic characteristics.  <b><i>Support parents and carers</i></b> Get to know the parents or carers; keep up good communication and don't communicate through the child. Try to be understanding and compassionate: living with a child who has trauma and attachment difficulties can be very stressful.  <b><i>Maintain your role</i></b> Don't be tempted to move too far out of your role. These children need caring and competent teachers (p.30).</p>	<p>Downey, L. (2007) <b><i>Calmer classrooms: A guide to working with traumatised children</i></b>. Melbourne: Child Safety Commissioner. Retrieved 21 August 2011 from: <a href="http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/downloads/calmer_classrooms.pdf">http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/downloads/calmer_classrooms.pdf</a></p> <p>(Model used by <i>The Pavilion</i>)</p>
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**NEEDS & CHALLENGES**

**PROGRAM SUCCESS FACTORS**

**REFERENCE (& DESCRIPTION)**

	<p><b><i>Participating in systems: the care team approach</i></b>                  The network of workers and carers surrounding traumatised children should have forums to meet in, and processes for reflection and collectively managing the inevitable anxieties these children arouse. Teachers and other school personnel should be open to bringing their experiences and their worries to the table at these meetings (p. 27).</p> <p><b><i>Conclusion</i></b>                  A strong attachment to their school can provide a child with stability in an otherwise unstable world: offering relationships, maintaining friendships, providing positive and enjoyable learning opportunities and ultimately building resilience and hope (p. 28).</p>	
	<p>A sense of safety comes from consistent, attentive, nurturing, and sensitive attention to each child's needs. Safety is created by predictability, and predictability is created by consistent behaviors. And the consistency that leads to predictability does not come from rigidity in the timing of activities it comes from the consistency of interaction from the teacher</p>	<p>Perry, B. <i>Creating an Emotionally Safe Classroom</i>. Retrieved 21 August 2011 from:  <a href="http://teacher.scholastic.com/professional/bruceperry/safety_wonder.htm">http://teacher.scholastic.com/professional/bruceperry/safety_wonder.htm</a>                  (Author referred to by Pavilion staff)</p>
	<p><b>ABSTRACT</b>                  Social work depends on <i>relationship building</i> to achieve its goals. This requires knowledge derived from research, as well as the intuitive understanding and interpretive abilities that are refined through experience with clients. The evidence-based practice movement and its forebears have for decades attempted to determine which theory or method of practice is most effective... However, extensive meta-analyses have determined that other variables – in particular, the <i>quality of alliance formed between worker and client</i> – matter most in predicting outcomes. This article summarises the research and concludes that the evidence supports an <i>improvisatory conception of practice</i>, and that improved outcomes will result when there is increased attention to those variables that <i>enhance the working alliance</i>. (Emphasis ours).</p>	<p>Graybeal, C. T. (2007) Evidence for the Art of Social Work. <i>Families in Society</i>, 88 (4). Pp. 513-525.</p>

**NEEDS & CHALLENGES**

**PROGRAM SUCCESS FACTORS**

**REFERENCE (& DESCRIPTION)**

The following information is drawn from a preliminary literature compilation by Elian Deur, who worked at Kildonan UnitingCare in Youth Connections:

<p>Common barriers of young people’s disengagement from education, as identified through Kildonan’s Youth Connections program in 2010 and first quarter 2011 were: bullying, inadequate family support, suspected/ diagnosed mental health, behavioural (including at risk) problems, low self esteem, low literacy and/or numeracy.</p> <p>There are long waiting lists in the local area to support young people who are disengaged from the mainstream school system. ‘...the research suggests that Youth Connections clients and Pavilion clients would benefit from youth programs while waiting to commence school’ (Deur, 2011, pp. 2, 13).</p>	<p>Effective strategies must include: mentoring, early intensive pathways &amp; careers planning, career guidance, co-ordinated welfare, family outreach, programs to improve social skills, tutoring, targeted \$ support, intensive continuum of case management, assistance for skill development among low achievers.</p> <p>The most effective programs offer connectedness, trust, tasks with tangible results, allowance of diverse needs, addressing poor achievement &amp; personal obstacles.</p> <p>Case management major factor to effective projects developed to help retain students in education &amp; training &amp; promote successful transitions to further study &amp; work (DETYA, 2001 cited by DEECD, 2008; as cited by Deur, 2011, p.17).</p> <p>Young people at risk of becoming disconnected must have access to an affordable range of broader cultural, recreational, sporting &amp; community service activities to promote community participation and transition to independence. This can provide rich &amp; varied learning opportunities and help to develop leadership skills. Opportunities to also develop literacy, numeracy &amp; communications skills (YPAPT, 2001, as cited by Deur, 2011, p. 4).</p> <p>It is suggested that interventions address multiple aspects of youth circumstances &amp; provide family, community, schools &amp; job training programs. School &amp; job training programs assist youth to reengage by offering counselling, child care, transportation, assistance to obtain a high school diploma &amp; workforce preparation (Fernandes &amp; Gabe, 2009; as cited by Deur, 2011, p. 4). (<i>US study</i>).</p> <p>The Government Accountability Office (GAO) reviewed federally funded programs. Successful programs for reengaging youth had: effective staff &amp; leadership, holistic approaches to multiple &amp; individual needs, experiential learning opportunities, self-paced curricula and a focus on developing youth’s leadership skills (Fernandes &amp; Gabe, 2009; as cited by Deur, 2011, p. 5). (<i>US study</i>).</p> <p>‘When planning a program for disconnected youth, the research findings suggest integrating the following models of practice:</p>	<p>Deur, E. (2011) <i>School Waiting Lists Program Proposal Research</i>. Epping: Kildonan UnitingCare (unpublished) p. 1</p>
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## NEEDS & CHALLENGES

## PROGRAM SUCCESS FACTORS

## REFERENCE (& DESCRIPTION)

- Ongoing monitoring or outreach on completion (assurance of a JSA or Youth Connections case manager)
- Identification of educational and/or vocational options with transition planning for work, education & independence
- Knowledge of options & opportunities for links to community
- Practical jobs skills training, work experience & education pathways
- Broad/ multi developmental goals for personal, interpersonal, social, literacy, numeracy, confidence & communication
- Resilience, living & AOD skill building
- Leadership (tutor/ peers) opportunities
- Team dynamics & group work
- Voluntary commitment

Also programs must:

- Be affordable
- Have a broad range of cultural, recreational, sporting & community (including family) activities to promote participation
- Avoid delays
- Have only half day sessions that run a minimum of 6-8 weeks but preferably last a school year
- Be self paced, non-threatening & non-punitive
- Have less structure and more supportive, validating & empowering environments
- Allow for creativity, problem solving & goal setting
- Be youth and care-centred
- Be knowledge centred
- Have places & spaces to grow beyond existing perspectives, broaden horizons, improve at least one context of their life and leave participants enriched (Deur, 2011, p. 9).

Other success factors (via other studies):

- Culturally relevant programs
- Inclusion of higher level needs into broader development policies

Engagement with the arts has the potential to foster identity & self esteem & facilitate broader and stronger connections with education.

Sporadic access to creative activities negative impacts for disadvantaged young people, while continuity & follow up had positive impacts in long term skill development.

## NEEDS & CHALLENGES

## PROGRAM SUCCESS FACTORS

## REFERENCE (& DESCRIPTION)

<p><i>Youth with emotional disturbance:</i></p> <p>(see list of issues)</p> <p>Barriers to successful transitions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uncoordinated systems</li> <li>• Socio-economic &amp; community factors</li> </ul> <p>Lack of appropriate education, vocational training &amp; socio-economic realities contributing to anti-social behaviours &amp; maladjustment to adult life.</p>	<p>Art programs for all social backgrounds provides invaluable connection and conduit to other education (De Roeper, Savelsberg, 2009; as cited by Deur, 2011, pp. 17, 18).</p> <p>Best practices for youth with emotional disturbance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on self-determination</li> <li>• Strengths-based approach</li> <li>• Systematic transition planning beginning in middle school years</li> <li>• Individualised services within a community coordinated support system</li> <li>• One on one intensive case management</li> <li>• Education system coordination with community services</li> <li>• Support to break cycles of poverty</li> <li>• Inclusion into mainstream</li> <li>• Continual support</li> <li>• Policies supporting transition to mainstream society</li> <li>• Identified alternatives to support troubled youth</li> <li>• Youth-directed planning of support services post-school</li> </ul>	<p>Various research cited by Deur, 2011, (see list below)</p> <p>NB: Eliana Deur worked as a Youth Connections Worker at Kildonan UnitingCare and carried our preliminary research for this project.</p>
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### References by Eliana Deur (2011) (see third column above)

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**ATTACHMENT TWO:  
SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM COMPONENTS:  
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**





# DISENGAGED YOUTH PROGRAMS & SUCCESS FACTORS<sup>4</sup>

Program Name (& ref)	Aim & Description	Needs & Challenges	Success Factors
Kildonan's Youth Connections program (Whittlesea region)  (Deur, 2011, p. 1).	To engage youth at risk of ceasing education, have recently ceased education or have ceased education for 3 months and are not employed.	To support young people to find suitable and appropriate education/employment pathways	High progressive & final outcomes in terms of numbers
It's not OK to be away  DEECD (2006) <i>'It's Not OK to be Away' Student Attendance Support Kit</i> . Melbourne: DEECD.	Victorian student attendance & truancy reduction resource kit		High risk students who struggle with attendance should be managed with the following strategies: case management approaches, student support groups, student centred programs, individual learning plans, programs inside & outside school & planning for transitions. These approaches work best with a non-punitive approach.
DEEWR's (2009) Youth Compact 'earn or learn' practice of streamlined services  (Deur, 2011, pp. 15,16).	Youth Transitions agenda targets at risk and disengaged young people; each service must aim to maximise engagement, attainment & successful transitions of mainstream, alternative or training pathways for education & life skills. The new agenda includes: multiple learning pathways for Year 12 or equivalent, career development, mentoring, school, business & community partnerships & individualised personalised support. The strategy includes support for numeracy/literacy, low SES & quality teaching.	The 2009 National Assessment & Numeracy (NAPLAN) report revealed that 10% of school students are failing to meet the minimum standards for reading, writing & numeracy. Research shows that more boys leave school early than girls. Barriers to school engagement are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low school achievement</li> <li>• History of dissatisfying experiences at school</li> <li>• History of truancy, suspension or school exclusion</li> <li>• Low self esteem</li> <li>• Behavioural issues</li> <li>• Low literacy/ numeracy</li> <li>• Disability</li> <li>• MH issues</li> <li>• MH-undiagnosed</li> <li>• Disconnection from family</li> <li>• Homelessness</li> <li>• Carer responsibilities</li> <li>• AOD issues</li> <li>• Contact with criminal justice systems</li> </ul> <p>Young people discontinued Youth Pathways if didn't receive full service or not in</p>	A good model is innovative, individualised & offers a genuine continuum of care within a case management framework. A whole community approach keeps young people engaged, educated & connected to their families. A good model is driven by the needs of young people and includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of personal barriers</li> <li>• Development &amp; implementation of an individual transition plan</li> <li>• Intensive case management</li> <li>• Group work</li> <li>• Problem solving</li> <li>• Motivation, skills building &amp; counselling</li> <li>• Mentoring &amp; advocacy</li> <li>• Mediation &amp; assistance to employment opportunities</li> <li>• Referral to specialist services</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> From (previous Youth Connections Worker): Deur, E. (2011) *School Waiting Lists Program Proposal Research*. Epping: Kildonan UnitingCare (unpublished).

		<p>school on commencement. Maj were still in school, ed or training bc of successful exit. Greatest risk: Indigenous, refugees, disability, integration needs, low achievers, low SES, family stress, NHs of high poverty, remote location, complex welfare needs, MH, foster care, independent living, carers of parents. Yo ple disengage progressively for years before quitting (DEEWR, 2009; as cited by Deur, 2011, p.17).</p>	
<p>Moving Forward (Hume City Council)  (Deur, 2011, pp. 2,3).</p>	<p>8 week personal development &amp; work readiness program for young people not attending school or starting to look for work. 3 days p.w. 10am -2pm. Funded by Salvation Army Crossroads, Hume City Council Youth Services &amp; supported by HWLLEN &amp; Vic Police. Addresses practical job skills &amp; education pathways &amp; also personal development, confidence, resilience, living skills &amp; team dynamics. Sessions include guest speakers, excursions &amp; lunch with speakers. Each has a budget and makes their own lunch.</p>	<p>Majority are severely disengaged with low literacy. Inadequate places for alternative schools in Hume; lack of places for students 13-14 years old.</p>	<p>Short days retain interest Group work rather than individual work Creating community links &amp; opportunities Empowerment &amp; exposure to opportunities Broadmeadows: 86% secure places on VCAL/further education courses Sunbury: 90% course attendance, with 70% engaged into a following course. On completion, participants have links to other educational opportunities</p>
<p>Wheels Program (Pahran)  (Deur, 2011, p. 3).</p>	<p>Similar to Moving Forward</p>		
<p>Return to Education and/or Vocation Program (REV)  (Deur, 2011, pp. 3,4).</p>	<p>A Victorian activity based group educational program. Art &amp; Craft, Sport &amp; Leisure, Work Education &amp; Community Access program. Targets 14-17 y.o. who are CAMHS clients &amp; not attending school or at risk of exclusion. Aims to identify educational and/or vocational options, provides work experience &amp; develops practical skills while assisting with adjustment &amp; transition into education and vocational settings. If have MH issues must have a case manager.</p>		<p>Group work for anxiety Targeting &amp; capitalising on young people contemplating change Activities based Mix of personal, social &amp; vocational skills learning Finds place in an appropriate new school Ongoing outreach for those not ready after 8 weeks – when ready placed in new school Monitoring during and after completion of program</p>

<p>Changemakers (UK)</p> <p>(Deur, 2011, p. 4).</p>			<p>Planning &amp; delivery of community service activities, involving young people in the life of their community.</p> <p>‘Schools, community agencies, cultural, recreational &amp; sporting body partnerships must create real opportunities for young people’s participation in their programs for effective transitions.’</p>
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Also cited in consultations for this project:

- Project Edge
- Op New Start
- Brunswick Youth Services
- Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (Epping)
- Ignition
- Teenage Activity Group
- Salvation Army Life Skills
- Finding My Place
- Mid year symposium (RMIT with Hume)
- Prospective Leaders (PL)
- Making Choices brunch (RMIT)
- Work experience program (RMIT)