

The Whittlesea Youth Commitment

A Review

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Whittlesea Youth Commitment (WYC) is a long-term community initiative that aims to guarantee every young person in the City of Whittlesea has the opportunity and support to complete Year 12 or its equivalent through training or employment, and to develop new learning, training, further education and work options and arrangements to achieve this goal. The key initial focus has been on enabling those young people who leave before completing Year 12 to make a smooth transition between school and further education, training or employment. The Youth Commitment aims to provide a safety net in the community for all young people, and in particular to improve the processes as young people leave school.

This review was commissioned to document the development of the Whittlesea Youth Commitment, assess progress to date, and suggest how the Commitment could be strengthened. The findings are the result of a review of all key documents, a survey of all schools and other stakeholders involved, and interviews and discussions with students, early school leavers, transition brokers, employers and representatives of agencies involved.

Achievements to Date - Key Findings

The Whittlesea Youth Commitment has evolved through a partnership between local agencies with an interest in the long-term well-being of young people in the local community. As a result of jointly exploring what was happening to young people in Whittlesea after reaching 15 years of age, these agencies have recognised their common responsibility for supporting school leavers to achieve the skills, confidence and ability required to live, work and actively participate in their community.

Supported by two external agencies with skills in action research, a framework has been progressively established that has gradually evolved from an acceptance of common responsibility into a series of benchmarks with the potential to measure joint accountability. The time and effort required to bring disparate organisations and sectors together over the past three years has been considerable, but the benefit is evident in the strong sense of ownership of the Youth Commitment in a range of organisations, the strengthened basis for collaboration in a range of associated projects, and the desire to develop a system that accommodates the needs of the full range of school leavers.

The structures and systems of the Whittlesea Youth Commitment have evolved from substantial research about the needs of young people and the way that the service systems have responded to these needs. This evolutionary approach contrasts with other initiatives linking schools, industry and the broader community that frequently establish the structures and systems first, and then seek to instigate change.

- The Whittlesea Youth Commitment has demonstrated the value that developing collaborative approaches can bring from a shared responsibility for creating change. Amongst the eight schools involved, the collective understanding of the importance of early school leaving is evident in their responses. The adoption of common exiting procedures, their willingness to share data about their schools, and their preparedness to consider joint resourcing arrangements speaks loudly of an acceptance of shared responsibility.
- The formation of a Community Team that regularly brings together people from all the agencies working with young people in education, training, employment and community service settings is further evidence of a system evolving which is being built around the needs of early school leavers. This Team is a forum for the exchange of information and data on young people, as well as identifying gaps in services and sharing different perspectives on professional practice.
- The Whittlesea Youth Commitment has demonstrated the effectiveness of a case management approach to supporting young people in transition, including the impact of producing an individual plan to assist young people clarify their options and assess the risks of early school leaving.
- Adopting comprehensive case management of potential early school leavers has had a highly positive impact on school retention rates, with one third of students under case management deciding to remain at school rather than leaving school. The total number of early school leavers across the eight schools has been dramatically reduced within a period of two years.
- The appointment of transition brokers and the emphasis on local data collection has been able to produce a much more complete picture of the actual destinations and pathways being taken by early school leavers. An impact of the approach has been to dramatically reduce the numbers of early school leavers going to unknown destinations. It is now apparent that many early school leavers whose destination was previously unknown have been moving into the training system, mainly in TAFE Institutes.
- Participating schools are beginning to modify their curriculum, provide flexibility in learning programs for particular students, and generally provide more support for students considering leaving school early.
- The strategies developed by the Whittlesea Youth Commitment have also created stronger links and much greater awareness between sectors and agencies of the local systems and services that support young people, particularly early school leavers. These links and greater awareness are already having 'spin-off' effects in facilitating other collaborative ventures of benefit to young people in the region.
- To a limited extent, the Commitment has also been able to provide a framework in which agencies can exchange data and contribute resources to a common pool of funds to provide specific services for young people. One practical example is the decision of all government schools to pool a proportion of their Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) program funding to appoint three transition brokers to work across the schools. Another is the joint production of a Guide for School Leavers, widely used across the municipality, that is updated and coordinated by an education- industry agency, while being printed and distributed by the City of Whittlesea. The

School Leavers Guide has provided a resource that is as useful for staff in agencies as it is for young people.

- Other agencies are also modifying their operations to improve their services provided to early school leavers. Centrelink has introduced a number of changes to the way they link with schools and provide services to young people who may not be eligible for financial support.

The innovation that has occurred and the experience gained in Whittlesea have been of benefit to many other communities. Information and advice has been provided to interested networks and organisations around Australia, and many of the ideas initially trialled here are now being replicated as part of approaches in other communities to dealing with similar issues affecting young people. Considerable work has been done documenting the processes and tools developed and used in Whittlesea that now form a publicly accessible resource.

Since work began on the Whittlesea Youth Commitment late in 1998, the Victorian Government has introduced Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) across the state, including one covering both Whittlesea and Hume local government areas. The LLEN in Hume and Whittlesea has been established to promote cross-sectoral cooperation and community support for young people in effectively planning for post-compulsory education and training pathways.

The scale and scope of the process used in Whittlesea has been made manageable through the use of a Spirit of Cooperation Agreement. While the new Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLEN) being implemented are based on a model of representation of sectors and agencies, Whittlesea has depended on agencies recognising their own interest and stake in the issues surrounding early school leaving. Their preparedness to commit to a formal cooperative agreement has subsequently provided a mandate for project officers to implement a range of projects and request the cooperation of participating organisations.

- In the developing relationship between the Whittlesea Youth Commitment and the Hume Whittlesea LLEN, the community-led processes in Whittlesea developed over the past three years provide a platform to inform and further develop the capacity of agencies to collaborate and integrate their services.

Further Requirements - Key Findings

Although significant progress has been made, members of the Whittlesea Youth Commitment management group acknowledge that there is much still to do. Many of the following issues are already under discussion within various forums, and are incorporated within the plans agreed to by the Commitment stakeholders for the next few years.

The recently negotiated Five Year Plan through a major consultation process has identified many of the issues listed below. The challenge now is to ensure that the contents of the Five Year Plan are translated into accountable action by the organisations participating in the Commitment.

So far, most of the impact of the Youth Commitment has been felt in the eight participating schools. Changes to practice, reallocation of resources, and height-

ened awareness of the issues relating to early school leaving have been most evident in the schools sector.

Reporting on outcomes achieved is also focussed on the school system through the role of brokers in data collection. Other sectors and organisations supporting young people need to become more engaged, and establishing processes to collect and report data on their contact with young people and the outcomes will assist this process

- All organisations involved need to be reporting on their contribution to the process on at least an annual basis, to ensure that signing the Spirit of Co-operation Agreement is an active and meaningful commitment. There should be an annual forum of Whittlesea Youth Commitment stakeholders to review progress, set plans and to re-confirm goals.

Though the majority of potential school leavers are now identified and assisted before leaving school, a small number continue to slip out of the education system undetected. Further development of the systems put in place to **identify potential early school leavers** are required. More extensive use of the surveys, stronger links between school transition teams and the transition brokers, mentoring programs, and the greater involvement of parents are all suggested.

- The intention survey used to identify considering leaving school early should be administered at least twice a year and preferably each term, and the content should be reviewed to refine the filters used to assess those at risk of early school leaving.
- Communication strategies focussed on the parents of students in the post-compulsory years need to be developed in schools and reported back to the Whittlesea Youth Commitment management group. These strategies should seek to actively engage parents in working with transition team members to assist students at risk of early school leaving. The regular use of school newsletters for inclusion of information and data on the Commitment is recommended.
- More structure needs to be provided for the interface between school transition teams and transition brokers, including regular meetings to monitor role duplication and formal feedback on the factors that influence young people to leave school.
- Exploration of the use of a systematic mentoring strategy that could combine the resources of MIPs staff, transition brokers, and selected teachers could assist in the management of the referral processes within the school, and integrate the brokers with the school's transition preparation programs. Teams of mentors should include members of the wider Whittlesea community.

The Commitment has produced a greatly improved knowledge of the **destinations of those leaving school early**. However, only short-term destinations are currently being reported. The results of contact made with young people up to 12 months after leaving should be reported to provide a much better understanding about the long-term destinations and pathways taken by early school leavers.

- Reporting on the destinations of school leavers should be reported from the second contact (between 6 and 12 months after exiting) as well as from the initial contact as is currently occurring.
- More detailed knowledge of the outcomes being achieved by young people in Whittlesea two or more years after leaving school would begin to provide a much fuller picture. A supplementary environmental scan concentrating on the situation of those aged between 19 and 22 would complement the detailed data being generated by the destination tracking process.

There are currently three **transition brokers** providing a combination of case management and tracking services to the eight schools participating in the Commitment. They each cover two or three schools on a rostered basis.

- A preferable ratio would be one broker working across two schools in order to effectively case manage all potential early school leavers needing their services. Planned and structured professional development support is required to optimise the brokers' effectiveness, including arrangements to link them more closely to non-education systems and agencies.

It remains the case in Whittlesea that the majority of **school resources and curriculum options** remain focussed on students undertaking the final two years of schooling. This includes VET in the VCE programs, part-time New Apprenticeships, structured workplacement and enterprise programs. Diversifying curriculum options and alternative programs for students in Years 9 and 10 are still small in scale and comparatively limited. A more detailed understanding of what constitutes 'equivalence' to the completion of Year 12 would help to map the local options.

- An audit of the relative resources and variety of program options for the middle years and the senior years of secondary schools could be undertaken to determine the extent of need for increased attention to providing alternative options for students in Years 9 and 10.
- While the Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) program enables the collaborative use of school resources to strengthen case management and tracking of early school leavers, it also offers scope to construct community-wide programs assisting students in Years 9 and 10 whose needs would be identified through mentoring, case management and action planning activities.
- Anecdotal information suggests that low levels of literacy and numeracy are frequently contributing to the decision of many young people to leave school early in Whittlesea. This issue seems to warrant further investigation, and an action research project examining the extent of the problem and the response of education and training providers could develop an improved approach.
- Developing and documenting an agreed set of benchmarks for local programs that form an equivalent outcome to completion of Year 12 at school would assist in assessing the progress made in diversifying curriculum and programs, and determining gaps that remain to be addressed.

The education and training passport, designed as a portable tool to document the young person's transition plan and to provide a framework for referral and tracking through service system, is only being used to a limited extent. A review of the effectiveness of the passport and the way it is distributed is warranted.

- The Passport could be redeveloped through the MIPs program in a more viable form that will be used by young people (for example, an email address developed while they are still at school that provides similar details to those on the passport that could become a 'portable site').
- Reporting back on the number of times each agency has a Passport 'presented' in a fixed period (monthly or quarterly) would provide a more definitive guide to the extent and patterns of use.

The **pathway to employment** for young people in Australia seeking work remains complex, fragmented and difficult to negotiate, especially for those leaving school early. There are system issues confronting all early school leavers in the Commonwealth Government's separation of job seeking and job matching services from Centrelink. The complexity of the requirements for early school leavers to negotiate their entitlements between Centrelink, the various Job Network alternatives, and revamped labour market programs makes the pathway through the employment services sector very problematic.

The current case management model is operating effectively across the education and training threshold, and tries to make the appropriate connections to employment through the various government funded employment services sector. A means needs to be found to extend the case management model used by the school-based brokers to encompass the **employment placement services** in order to try to build bridges across the gaps in the system. Centrelink's Epping Office has already made some important changes in the way it communicates and provides access to young people in Whittlesea. There is other evidence of arrangements to facilitate easier access already being introduced in a piecemeal way.

- Examples of direct links being established between employment services providers and schools, through notifications of vacancies, engagement in employment preparation activities, and helping develop flexible program options combining study and work should be systematically pursued and implemented between employment services and all schools.
- As the progressive implementation of MIPs provides resources to manage the collection and reporting of data on the destinations of early school leavers, the role of the transition brokers could be repositioned to continue in their case management role and develop their capacity to perform more brokerage across the employment services and Centrelink in a more systematic approach.

Despite a number of **local employers** signing up to the Whittlesea Youth Commitment and participating in employer roundtables, the level of engagement remains relatively low. Examples of new initiatives creating local employment opportunities for young people remain isolated. Progress might be facilitated by identifying one or two industry sectors with identified potential for the employment of young people, and then working collaboratively with economic development agencies, employers and other relevant services to construct pathways and appropriate support systems.

- An employment strategy that focuses on a few key industry sectors with high employment potential for young people (such as retail, construction and health) could allow a targeted approach to both employers and to the development of programs and support structures. There are also some useful examples of strategies linking schools and local employers that could be effectively promoted to these sectors.

Part-time apprenticeships for secondary students have not been taken up by either employers or students, and **more flexible combinations of work, employment and training** developed locally may have more potential for those seeking to leave school early.

- Reporting is also needed against benchmarks established for increasing employment, apprenticeships and traineeship opportunities to focus attention in these areas. This should include data collection and reporting by Job Network agencies of the levels of assistance provided to young people.
- Part-time employment for school students is an important component of employment preparation, and use of a measure of part-time employment while students are still at school should be developed and reported against.

Despite the aspirations of many potential early school leavers seen by the transition brokers, they often lack **job readiness**. Schools alone are not in a position to meet this need. A coalition of support between employment services, education and training providers and other agencies is required to improve the preparation of young people for work.

The Whittlesea Youth Commitment management group acknowledge that some elements have worked better than others have, and that they are still casting around for solutions to problems they have identified in the transition process. The Five Year Plan identifies a number of the key steps ahead.

However, the achievements of the Whittlesea Youth Commitment are already significant.

The benefits for young people in Whittlesea are real, and can be demonstrated.

THE WHITTLESEA YOUTH COMMITMENT A REVIEW

1. Introduction

Whittlesea is a community to the north of Melbourne where the suburbs finally meet the fringes of small farms and rural townships.

It is the setting of a remarkable community collaboration; one that has brought together schools, local state and commonwealth government services, community agencies, training providers, employers, and employment services. They have joined together to develop and test new approaches to supporting young people as they leave school seeking jobs, training or further education. This new community collaboration is called the "Whittlesea Youth Commitment".

The Whittlesea Youth Commitment (WYC) is a long-term community initiative that aims to ensure that every young person leaving school in the City of Whittlesea, especially those who leave before completing year twelve or its equivalent, make a smooth transition between school and further education, training or employment. The Youth Commitment aims to provide a safety net in the community for all young people, and in particular to improve the processes as young people leave school.

Whittlesea is a fast growing outer suburban and semi-rural municipality with a population of more than 120,000 people in Melbourne's northern corridor. The numbers of young people are rapidly expanding. The group aged between 10 and 19 currently comprises 16% of the population in the City of Whittlesea. This age group is projected to increase by 23% in the period 1996-2016.¹ Its young people predominantly attend one of the eight local secondary schools (seven government and one catholic college) in the municipality.

While the social and economic indicators for young people in Whittlesea (school retention to Year 12, youth unemployment, and access to higher education) are comparable to other municipalities close by in northern Melbourne, it has a low school retention rate (71%) and high youth unemployment (19%).

In 1998, when the process leading to the Whittlesea Youth Commitment began, nearly 35% of those students leaving schools in the City of Whittlesea who had not completed Year 12 were going to "no known destination".

Unemployment for the 15-24 year old age group is double that of older age groups, and there are fewer participating in any form of education than the Melbourne average.² Most employment opportunities in the region are with small and small/medium sized businesses.

The anticipated population growth over next ten years is expected to place pressure on already strained public education system and on creation of new employment opportunities.

2. When Young People Leave School Early

When a young person leaves school, especially those who leave early, there is no particular agency responsible for ensuring that they access or receive the assistance that is available to obtain further education, employment or training. This is a major issue given the changes in recent years to employment referral and placement services, and the general increasing complexity of the youth labour market.³ There is strong evidence that many young people do not understand or know how to navigate through the complex referral and application systems to receive benefits, source training opportunities, and access employment.⁴

Knowledge, or lack of it, is one part of the potential problem. Lack of skills are another. Both international and domestic studies over the past decade have repeatedly concluded that the group of young people most "at risk" upon completing school are those leaving school early with insufficient qualifications and skills.⁵

One measure of the level of disadvantage resulting from early school leaving is the number of this group in the total pool of teenagers not in education or training, and who are either unemployed or not in the labour force. In 1998 of 114,000 teenagers in this situation in Australia, 80,000 were early school leavers.⁶ The significance of early school leaving is that young people in this situation are entering the labour market with insufficient education and skills to be successful in the long term. Greater effort needs to be made to encourage them to stay on at school, and also to support them in the world beyond school if they choose to leave.⁷

Recently published national data confirms that while 69 per cent of students who complete Year 12 go on to higher education, TAFE or other further education, of those who leave in Year 11 only 39 per cent follow the same path, and only 43 per cent of Year 10 leavers. Just over one third (34 per cent) of these Year 10 and Year 11 early school leavers have not found full-time work five months later.⁸

Local data confirms the national picture. A survey of 128 young people in the City of Whittlesea contacted in 2001 by the Youth Services section of the Council shows that leaving school without completing Year 12 and without already having a secure job or training place results in a high risk of resulting long term unemployment. This survey indicated 42 were 'early school leavers' of whom 75% were 'not working'.⁹

3. Background to the Commitment

In the absence of a central organisation or agency that is responsible for young people as they leave school to access other options, organisations in Whittlesea have joined together to try to construct a new system of support.

The Youth Commitment has evolved from a history of collaboration and cooperation between many organisations within the municipality, and was triggered by a series of research projects funded by the Northern Area Consultative Committee (ACC).

Over several years, there were a number of investigations and research studies to try to identify the circumstances of young people in the local community. These included a destination survey of school leavers; a regional skills audit; a funding map to identify the resources being allocated to support young people in different circumstances; an audit of careers teaching and vocational guidance in the government schools; and an environmental scan of youth participation. The end result of this series of local investigations was to make clearer the position of young people in Whittlesea, and made it harder for the issues to be ignored.

When we got together, and the transition broker started collecting data, we were surprised at how many kids were slipping through the cracks. It has very much made a difference.

Principal, Lalor North Secondary College

Some of these local organisations were dealing with the consequences of young people failing to bridge the gap after leaving school, in terms of unemployment, homelessness and delinquency. Others were primarily concerned with the lack of job readiness among young people, and with skills shortages reported by employers. And the education providers became increasingly interested in what was happening to their students after they left school, including those who left school early. As information was assembled, it became clearer that the various sectors and organisations were dealing with different facets of a connected issue.

In particular, those in the local education sector were increasingly concerned about rising levels of disengaged young people, "a sense that an increasing number of students still at school were 'reluctant stayers', and the knowledge that new income, employment assistance and training arrangements were unlikely to arrest the number of young people at risk of falling through the social safety net."¹⁰

4. Evolution of the Partnership

The development of the Youth Commitment is the story of how a series of small studies and investigations, combined with an existing base of interagency cooperation, has built trust, a framework for collaboration, and an evolving platform of support for young people in the region. The Whittlesea Youth Commitment was not the result of a well funded government program, but a combination of local service agencies, applied researchers, and coordinating agencies coming

together to creatively develop systems, source funding, and trial new ways of working together.

It is still a work in progress. Although there was a degree of clarity about what the end result should look like, the tools and techniques have been developed and trialled along the way, with ideas contributed from various sources. Some have worked more effectively than others. But the willingness to experiment and innovate has been a feature of this community.

The region had a solid track record of collaboration between local schools, the industry-education research and coordination agency (NIECAP) and local employers.¹¹ Schools in the Whittlesea Epping Lalor Thomastown Education Community, known as WELTEC, had been meeting as an umbrella group hosting various collaborative professional development activities, and network meetings from the mid 1980s.

The Northern Interactive Education Area Program (NIECAP) is part of the RMIT University community and regional partnerships agenda. Situated at the Bundoora campus of the university, NIECAP seeks to build partnerships between the university, schools, industry, training organisations and the community within Melbourne's northern region. A particular focus of NIECAP's work is the transition of young people from school into post compulsory education, training or employment, and their action research projects and school and industry activities are conducted in this context.

In 1996, the Area Consultative Committee (ACC) co-located with NIECAP at the RMIT Campus, bringing together two agencies with the capacity to establish research activity and an interest in the issue of young people's post-school pathways. Both agencies were also interested in changing systems to produce better outcomes for young people, and there were close links between the two.

An important factor was the level of support provided to these investigations from agencies with access to research capacity and knowledge, and some (limited) resources that could support innovation, trial ideas, and adopt a cross sectoral approach without being responsible for a particular aspect of service delivery. The Area Consultative Committee and NIECAP were locally based, and straddled both industry and education research issues.

Local stakeholders had been holding discussions on improving interagency co-operation since early 1998. NIECAP in particular had strong relationships with secondary colleges in the region as a result of co-ordinating workplacements for VET in the VCE students, coordinating professional development for teachers, and researching school retention and post-school destinations.

The starting point or trigger was an action research project to investigate whether the introduction of the Youth Allowance, which had been designed to encourage potential early school leavers to stay at school by removing the possibility of income support if they left, was actually having the effect that was intended.

In 1998, the Northern Area Consultative Committee (ACC) supported NIECAP's application under Regional Assistance Program (RAP) funding to conduct this project. The project found that young people continued to leave school either unaware of the lack of income support or undeterred in their decision to leave. The project also identified a lack of connection between the various agencies working with young people (schools, TAFE institutes, ACE providers,

Centrelink, Whittlesea Council, the Job Network and community support agencies), and concluded that 35% of students who were leaving school without completing Year 12 in the City of Whittlesea had "no known destination."¹² Importantly, the Project also identified that young people were not knowledgeable about the systems that were there to support them.

The City of Whittlesea's Family Services section were also concerned about the impact of the changes to the Youth Allowance on young people and their families within the local government area, and the consequences of early school leaving for the long term employment prospects of these young people.

We have seen the problem of early school leaving as very much a community problem.

Family Services Manager, City of Whittlesea

This study was followed up with a second research investigation into the destinations of School Leavers (also commissioned by the ACC) which confirmed that the destination of approximately one third of all students leaving school before completing Year 12 were unknown, and that the local retention rates were 9% below the State average.¹³

As this research was in progress, a third partner interested in action research in the same field made contact with project workers. The Dusseldorp Skills Forum was actively seeking to partner with a community interested in addressing the issues associated with early school leaving being identified in the studies commissioned by the ACC in the northern region. The existing collaborative relationships between the local schools and NIECAP provided a potential basis to test a community partnership approach to comprehensively supporting young people leaving school without completing year 12.

The Dusseldorp Skills Forum's research made sense of our local situation, and was the catalyst to bring it all together.

Manager of Family Services, City of Whittlesea

The involvement of the Dusseldorp Skills Forum provided access to international and national research capacity and knowledge in youth transition and skills formation. In the past few years, the Forum had published a series of key reports providing a national perspective on developments and issues affecting teenagers and young adults during the 1990s.¹⁴ The Forum now had a strong interest in acting in partnership with a local community to translate the research into a practical application.

The Dusseldorp Skills Forum, attracted to a local government area with a history of collaboration between schools to meet local needs, issued an invitation to a number of organisations to test the concept of a 'Youth Commitment'.

A pivotal meeting was convened late in 1998 at the instigation of the Northern ACC and the Dusseldorp Skills Forum. Attended by the Mayor of Whittlesea, two secondary school principals, a Job Network provider, TAFE representative and a major employer, the group considered the various research findings, and agreed to canvass local interest in developing a community response to the is-

sues. The intention was to test the possibility of developing new links between schools, further education, work and the community to provide a stronger safety net for young people in the City of Whittlesea.

Significantly, NIECAP, based at RMIT, was prepared and able to provide dedicated staff resources for a fixed period of time that enabled the research activities and the evolving management structure to be co-ordinated and the general momentum maintained.

Its been a great thing. It's come alive. You need the right people in the administrative support that goes with it, because everyone else has a full-time job. If you don't have those people there, no-one else has the time to take the ideas further.

Careers Teacher, St Monicas College

From that point, it took approximately twelve months to develop a framework with agreed goals and processes.¹⁵

In the interim, a further series of meetings was held between the City of Whittlesea, some of the secondary colleges in the region and NIECAP to consider the findings of the earlier research reports and plan a project based on strengthening support for young people in transition. The idea to develop a 'Youth Commitment' was soon agreed. By mid 1999, an Interim Management Group to pursue a Youth Commitment had been established.

One of the initial strategies was to collect more information and develop a better understanding about the pathways and destinations of early school leavers in the region.¹⁶ This included an 'environmental scan'; a quick study of the levels of youth participation in employment, education and training and the broader community services available to meet their needs in Whittlesea.

However, it was clear that more precise information was needed about what was happening to those young people who were leaving school before completing Year 12.

Solid local data is itself a great motivating force for change....When we aggregate data we do two things. Each school or provider, in handing over the statistics to a trusted local source, has revealed their own performance.... The second is that aggregation of data for local purposes means we focus on the needs of all young people in a community, not on the performance of an individual school or provider.

NIECAP coordinator, MMV Speech, October 2001

One of the features of the developing Youth Commitment partnership was the emphasis being placed on data collection and analysis, to later form the basis of benchmarking to determine what impact any changes might be having.

The project was also able to capitalise on the Dusseldorp Skills Forum's knowledge of other recent innovative pilots such as the use of transition officers trialled by the Brotherhood of St Laurence with two Victorian secondary colleges in the inner northern and southern metropolitan region in 1997-98. These transition officers assisted students at risk of leaving school prior to completing

Year 12. This project was designed to deliver a service to a small group of students who were at risk of leaving school early or who had decided to leave. The resulting transition project documented the experience of the young people, and identified useful elements of the project model.¹⁷

The eight schools in Whittlesea applied to the Victorian Department of Education for funds to appoint a 'Transition broker'. From July 1999, a transition broker was appointed, and commenced contacting 24 young people identified as having left school in Term One 1999 without a known destination. The initial work performed by the broker in tracking and supporting young people was encouraging.

The partnership has been built on an existing base of collaboration between agencies. Significantly, the approach has been based on tackling the issues as a responsibility of the broad community.

Early school leaving has not been treated as an issue to be addressed by an individual school, or even by the school system alone, but as a set of broad community responsibilities that has allowed the schools to become part of a much wider network of agencies and sectors attempting to address the causes and consequences of early school leaving.

Late in 1999, a benchmarking workshop was held to establish common indicators for the Youth Commitment. Following the workshop, the benchmarks adopted were:

- reducing the numbers of young people who leave school with an "unknown destination";
- increasing the retention of young people in full-time education and training;
- increasing the employment opportunities for young people;
- increasing the employer commitment to work-based learning; and
- strengthening the interaction of services.

The Whittlesea Youth Commitment was formalised early the following year. At a formal ceremony at the Whittlesea Civic Centre on 22 February 2000, 30 organisations representing employers, job networks, the three levels of government, secondary, TAFE and tertiary education, and community agencies signed the Spirit of Cooperation Agreement as founding members of the Whittlesea Youth Commitment.¹⁸ Two independent schools in the region decided not to become part of the process. The signatories are listed in Appendix 1.

The collectively developed Spirit of Cooperation Agreement provided a framework for the participating organisations, providing concrete goals, a governance structure, operational mechanisms, an ongoing process of performance review, and a timeframe for achieving change.

5. The Aims

The key aim of the Commitment was to provide an 'equivalent' outcome for young people. That is, outcomes of either competing Year 12, (seen to be the minimum skills and qualifications required of young people by employers) or the equivalent. The equivalence is generally defined as securing an apprenticeship or traineeship, obtaining a full-time job, or accessing further education and training.

The objectives originally framed for the Youth Commitment were to:

- Provide all young people with the opportunity and support to complete Year 12 or its equivalent.
- Be flexible about this equivalence, which will be defined by the needs and aspirations of young people themselves.
- Develop new learning, training, further education and employment options for young people to achieve these goals.
- Provide new workplacement, work opportunities, skill development, and community support structures for young people to achieve these goals.
- Establish a school and community based mediating structure that will assist young people to meet their knowledge, learning and labour market needs during the transition to adulthood.
- Develop and customise the curriculum provision of schools, TAFE and other training providers to better support the aspirations of young people.

6. The Operating Framework

Through the Spirit of Cooperation Agreement, the WYC is coordinated by a Management Group of representatives from the various sectors that meets monthly to manage the process. The Management Group is currently chaired by local government.

NIECAP at RMIT has provided the executive support and the action research capacity for 'the Commitment' for the initial two years since the conception of the strategy. Their role as an independent entity capable of building relationships across sectors, translating concepts into practical action, managing and interpreting the data collection processes, and providing the information and communication role has been pivotal.

Under the Agreement, participating organisations support the objectives of the Youth Commitment, agree to measure their own performance in relation to the goals set, and commit to participate in a Community Team comprising operational staff from community agencies and schools.

All participating organisations meet three times each year to monitor progress and refine the directions of the Commitment.

A new Five Year Plan has been developed through consultation with the various signatories to the process early in 2001, as well as a revised Spirit of Cooperation Agreement. The Plan and the revised Agreement were developed

through a process of identifying the extent of progress made to date as well as the requirements to make further gains.

The Community Team, comprising representatives from all agencies working directly with young people, has been introduced to develop collaboration and tracking, and to begin case conferencing about the needs of particular young people.

Three transition brokers are now working across eight schools in the Whittlesea local government area. The brokers have generally worked with young people to encourage them to remain at (or return to) school, accessed TAFE and structured training, and dealt with other learning difficulties such as literacy and numeracy.¹⁹

Schools have jointly pooled funds (from those allocated by the State Government to each government school for the Managed Individual Pathways [MIPs] initiative) to resource the transition broker positions. The broker's time in each school is rostered according to the financial contribution of the school to resourcing the position. (see case study on page 27)

7. The Processes put in Place

The original 1998 Youth Allowance Project had identified that a third of early school leavers had "an unknown destination". This became the springboard for developing a new approach.

While young people are still at school, they are more easily contacted and prepared for the issues they will face on leaving school, whenever that event occurs.

The Commitment has made significant progress in establishing processes to manage early school leaving. The main features of arrangements put in place to date are:

- The administration of a survey to all students in years 9,10 and 11 to determine the number of potential early school leavers through their indication of an intention to leave.
- The creation of a new "transition team", or the modification of existing arrangements in each school to establish whether each student has a clear and viable plan. This team consists of approximately four staff, drawn from the careers teacher, assistant principal or principal, year level coordinator and student welfare coordinator, varying from school to school. All exiting students should meet with members of the transition team before leaving school.
- The adoption of a common "exit form" used in all eight schools providing identical information. The completion of this form is used to identify those exiting school without a clear plan.
- Those students without a clear plan, or an employment or a training place to go to, are referred to a member of each school's transition team to discuss about their options.

- These students can then also be referred to one of the transition brokers if they are considering leaving school before completing Year 12. The transition broker's role is to provide information and advice, and help the young person develop a detailed plan.
- Each student leaving school before completing Year 12 who does not have a secure job, training place or further education to go to, is provided with an education and training passport (which contains information on their resume, referral information, and an action plan.) The intention of the "passport" is to provide all the information that each agency might need to assist the young person, and to provide a framework for tracking the individual.
- The transition brokers track every school leaver (whether or not they have previously seen a broker before leaving school) for at least 12 months to confirm their destination after leaving school, and to determine if they need more support. The tracking is performed mainly by telephone and contact is made at least twice within a year.
- Baseline data on the outcomes for young people is collected on a regular basis to assist in measuring progress over time.
- A team of representatives from all the agencies working with young people who have left school on education, employment and transition issues meet to collectively improve professional practice, monitor the pathways taken by young people, and identify opportunities to develop and refine processes and programs.

The following case study illustrates the support provided by the Youth Commitment can have for a young person leaving school, as well as demonstrating the active referral links operating between school staff, transition brokers, and other agencies such as JPP.

More detail is provided on the key features of the Youth Commitment process and approach in the following section. The extent to which these are contributing to improved outcomes in the transition of young people are discussed later in the report.

Case Study: **Jane**

At 16, Jane did not know what she wanted to do, but did know she did not want to be at school any more. *I just didn't like the school work.*

Jane was a Year 10 student lacking motivation and falling behind with schoolwork. There were frequent absences and she refused her parents' requests for her to attend school.

Referred by school staff to one of the transition brokers, an initial meeting was arranged to discuss her progress for the rest of year and the options for the next, but Jane did not show up. As a result, the broker contacted her parents who expressed concern that they could not find the reason she was refusing to attend school.

Eventually, the Broker was able to meet Jane and after some discussion, help her develop a resume and provide some vocational counseling. An offer to help Jane catch up with her work was not taken up.

Then, in a breakthrough, the parents contacted the broker. Jane had finally told them that she did not want to attend school because she could not read or spell and was hopeless at writing.

The broker referred Jane to the Jobs Pathways Program (JPP) for a literacy assessment, but again, she did not attend the school on the day the assessment was scheduled, so a meeting was rescheduled, this time to be held in the JPP office. This assessment confirmed that her literacy skills were the reason she was falling behind in work, and lacking motivation to attend school.

The JPP staff then suggested a range of possible agencies and programs to the broker to assist Jane to improve her literacy skills, and the family as a whole started to investigate these options.

Jane takes up the story. *"The broker told us about the Island. She helped me to find it."*

The Island is an alternative education and training environment based in inner Melbourne, providing opportunities for hands on learning in a non-traditional school environment. The Island is organised into separate trade areas, so that Jane was able to try different industry areas from week to week, such as woodworking and metal work.

Jane discovered at the Island that she had an aptitude for woodwork, and after some preliminary training, she enrolled for a Certificate 11 in woodwork. Her talent in this area is leading her towards an interest in working in hard furnishings.

For Jane, the Island represented a fresh start and the opportunity to experiment with things that both challenged her, but for which she had some natural abilities. *"I made some new friends at the Island and I kept a lot of my friends from high school",* says Jane. *"I'll probably finish my apprenticeship in wood furnishing and try to find work in the area."*

While she has been at the Island, Jane has also discovered that she has both an interest and a talent for playing musical instruments, including song writing. She made a wooden guitar-shaped CD holder that so impressed a local music shop that they bought it in exchange for an electric guitar, and have put in a further order for one of her unique wooden creations.

In her mother' view, *"this may not be her ultimate niche in life, but at least she has tried a couple of things and she is much happier than she was beforehand."*

"If I hadn't found out about the Island through the broker I would probably have just tried to get a job doing whatever I could. This has helped me find something I like doing," says Jane.

Common Exit Procedures

Every young person leaving any of the schools in the Whittlesea Youth Commitment exits through completing a commonly agreed form which is signed off by one (or more commonly several) members of the Transition team in each school.

The common exit form is issued by a member of the school transition team

This exit form seeks information on the destination of the student leaving the school, including the type of employment they are seeking or details of their employment if they have already found a job; the TAFE or tertiary education place they have obtained, or if they are transferring to another school. The form also asks if the student consents to their details being provided to other agencies to help them access employment or further education.

Exiting students are counselled by the transition team member about their options and either given a School Leavers' Guide or passport (which also contains a School Leaver's Guide) depending on whether they have a course place or a job to go to. The counselling process is intended to include assistance in commencing an action plan with the student.

If the student exits the school without going through this process, a letter is sent to the parents explaining the process and the forms of support that are available.

Students assessed as requiring "intensive assistance" are referred to the transition broker who is based part-time in the school. The transition brokers counsel these students regarding their options, and also either issues a Guide or passport should the student decide to continue with their plans to leave school. The assistance also includes commencement of an action plan.

Destination Tracking

Destination tracking is carried out at a number of levels under the Whittlesea Youth Commitment.

1. The eight secondary colleges have agreed to provide data on student enrollments and destinations by year level twice a year (Feb 28 and June 30) taken from the school's administrative system. These record the **intended destinations** of students as they leave the school.
2. Tracking is also carried out by transition brokers, who using data taken from each school's reporting and administrative system, make contact with all those reported to have left the schools in the preceding term. This tracking is usually carried out through telephone contact with client or parents. This contact records the **actual short to medium term destinations** of young people after they have left school.
3. The Community Team also carries out tracking as young people move between agencies, but this is only possible when young people have signed

the form approving the sharing of their personal data. (If they exit school without the passport being issued, it is unlikely that they will have completed this approval process). Community Team tracking reports in summary form a list of clients who have presented at each agency in the past month. Detailed destination data is also provided twice a year categorised by the next agency clients were referred to. This reporting potentially provides information on the **pathway** taken by individuals through the network of organisations and agencies in Whittlesea.

These three data sources are provided to the Northern Interactive Education Coordinated Area Program (NIECAP) as the agency providing administrative and executive support to the Whittlesea Youth Commitment. NIECAP collects the information for analysis and reporting to stakeholders.

The collection and analysis of data has been used from the inception of the Whittlesea Youth Commitment in order to benchmark the situation of young people, to set goals, and to determine the extent and rate of progress in strengthening the safety net for early school leavers.

All agencies signing the Spirit of Cooperation Agreement commit to the WYC privacy principles.

Transition Brokers

First piloted in 1999, the role of transition broker is to ensure that any young person considering leaving school before completing Year 12 is provided with counselling, advice and support. The intention is to assist each young person either to decide to remain at school, move to some other appropriate education setting, or to make the transition to employment or training.

In 1999, the first Transition broker appointed worked intensively with a sample of 24 early school leavers from the eight schools, providing individual case management and assistance.

Three transition brokers are currently each working with approximately 100 clients over a year, and up to 10 clients in each school at any one time. Brokers are located in the schools, each assisting young people in two or three schools on a regular rostered basis.

In addition to working with current school students referred to them by members of the school's transition team, the Brokers also make contact with all other young people who left school in the preceding term without seeing a transition broker. This follow-up is to ensure that the young person has successfully found work, training or further education; to offer them support and assistance if they have not; and to collect this data on the outcome for reporting back to the school and the Community Team.

While working within the schools and in a close relationship with each schools' transition team, they are not teaching staff. In 2001, the three transition brokers currently employed have backgrounds in youth work and employment services.

The three broker positions have been created through the seven government schools agreeing in late 2000 to pool a percentage of the Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) funding provided by the Victorian State Government in order

to resource these positions. This agreement also provided some limited access to the brokerage service for St Monicas College, which has made a small independent contribution although this Catholic school did not have access to the government MIPs funding. As one government school principal commented, "it would not normally be as easy to get agreement from principals to jointly fund something like transition brokers. It was due to the understanding built up through the Whittlesea Youth Commitment."

I am still at school in Year 11, but I am intending to leave. She (the broker) has really helped me out. It's really good. She explained that it's a lot harder looking for work than I thought. She suggested looking at enrolling in TAFE. I have got into the TAFE pre-apprenticeship program, and now I just have to show up and enroll. It was due to her that I got into the pre-apprenticeship program. She drove me down there and stuff. I've been seeing her every two or three weeks.

Year 11 current student

The School Leavers Guide

The "School Leaver's Guide" is a publication intended to be provided to both Year 12 students and early school leavers. The content is coordinated and updated by NIECAP, and the printing and distribution is funded by the City of Whittlesea.

The Guide is provided to young people leaving school by either the school transition team or the transition broker.

The current version of the Guide is 32 pages providing brief details on how to access New Apprenticeships, find a job through Centrelink and the Job Network, access further study, apply for short courses, obtain general help and advice, and deal with housing, legal, financial and drug and alcohol issues, all within the local area.

Listings include all members of the Job Network and the forms of assistance and advice available through Centrelink.

The School Leaver's Guide is issued to some school leavers as an independent resource. For those needing more intensive assistance, it is included within the passport package.

The City of Whittlesea has budgeted to update the Guide on an annual basis to date.

Many of the local agencies value the Guide as their own resource. One Job Network agency use them for other job seeking clients as well as for school leavers. Staff working in agencies report that it is also a highly useful resource for new employees or those not familiar with the local service system.

When I first got a copy of the School Leaver's Guide through the Whittlesea Youth Commitment, it was a real bonus. It provided all the contacts and the lists and links that I needed. It really was very useful.

Careers Teacher

The Education and Training Passport

The passport is held by each early school leaver who does not have a job or training place when they exit school. The passport comprises five separate sheets containing:

- personal contact details
- education and employment history
- information as the basis for a resume
- an Action plan which identifies their employment and/or education goals, and
- an individually customised list of potential people and agencies who can assist developed through consultation with a broker, transition team member, or other agencies.

The School Leaver's Guide is also included in the passport package.

The intention is to ensure that consistent information is provided to agencies, that the young person does not have to repeatedly fill out the same information again and again as they move around the network of support agencies, and also so that their "pathway" through the support system can be tracked (all previous contacts can be listed on the contact sheet, and noted by the 'current' agency working with them).

First produced in the middle of 2000, the format of the education and training passport was adapted from forms originally used in the Jobs Pathways Project (JPP) and the NIECAP School Leavers Destination Project. It has been developed into a common client information package.²⁰

The passport is intended to be issued to the young person at the point at which they leave school, given to them either by a member of the school's transition team, or a transition broker. However, if they do by some chance leave school without receiving a passport, they are then meant to be issued one at the first agency they present at in the region.

It is also issued to those completing Year 12 if their destination is uncertain at the time they leave school.

When the young person attends an agency for assistance, they are advised to take their Passport to make it quicker and easier to obtain assistance. As the young person moves between the agencies, the Passport is intended to assist the professional in the agency to quickly identify the assistance that is required.

The cover of the passport was designed by Year 10 students at Lalor Secondary College under a competition with a cash prize donated by one of the employers signed up to the Whittlesea Youth Commitment.

The Community Team

The Community Team meets twice each school term, or eight times a year.

The Community Team is made up of staff from the "participating agencies" who work directly with young people (from Centrelink, Job Network, Group Training, Further Education, TAFE, Jobs Pathways Programme, youth workers, community workers, Victoria Police, and each of the eight schools).

At least one member of each school's Transition team attends the Community Team meeting.

The main purpose of the Community Team is to collaborate in tracking the pathways taken by young people through the local service system.

The transition brokers also attend, and provide the Community Team with data on the destinations of exiting students as they become available term by term.

The Community Team also uses a 'community case management' approach based on case review. At each meeting, an anonymous profile of a young person is tabled at the meeting, and discussion results suggesting ways to work with the young person to achieve education and employment goals. This offers a chance for different professional approaches to be aired, highlighting the different approaches taken by local agencies.²¹

The Community Team has developed protocols for this community case management.

A Community Team Manual has been produced containing all the forms and agreed protocols associated with using the 'Passport', and for tracking young people once they have left school. The privacy of young people is maintained while staff working in employment and community agencies track their progress. Agreed privacy principles are incorporated into the practices of the Community Team.

Community Team meetings provide a forum for participants to discuss initiatives and issues in each sector, discuss existing pathways, and identify gaps in services.

8. Shared Responsibility

Fundamental to the approach adopted in Whittlesea has been the intention to develop joint responsibility and accountability for improving the circumstances of young people in the community, and for attempting to document those circumstances and any change that results.

Case Study: **Joint Resourcing of Transition brokers in Whittlesea**

The three Transition broker positions have been jointly resourced by contributions from seven government schools, one catholic college, and the TAFE Institute in the region. The majority of these contributions were allocated by schools from the funds provided by the State Government through the Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) initiative.

The Dusseldorp Skills Forum and NIECAP took the initiative in suggesting the pooled funds arrangement to the schools and the regional TAFE Institute.

The amount contributed varied from school to school, and the brokers time was allocated to schools accordingly. The agreement was that a basic allocation of a service one day a week would be provided for each school, with the balance of the broker's time allocated on the basis of need and the size of the school's student population.

Several options for resourcing were developed by principals. The approach needed to deal with the issue of differing levels of need and size of schools. The eventual approach agreed to was to make a base allocation from each school, supplemented by a contribution based on their school enrollment numbers.

Each government school incorporated in their MIPs plan submitted to the Department a contribution of a percentage of their MIPs funding. The agreement was to make a per capita contribution of \$100 per head of their student population plus 10% of their MIPs funding. The contributions of the 7 government schools ranged from \$ 7,000 to \$24,000 depending on the size of the school.

The Catholic school system did not have access to MIPs funding, so St Monicas College was not able to provide a large contribution. This school gets access to the Transition broker on an "as needed" basis, having contributed \$5000.

Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE also agreed to provide the additional \$12,000 required to provide three Brokers.

There is potential for some further pooling of funds from MIPs if concrete outcomes can be demonstrated for students. The current Five Year Plan is proposing to have some further MIPs funds pooled for future priority projects.

Since 1999, the Whittlesea Youth Commitment has adopted a number of agreed benchmarks and indicators to measure success and create a framework of shared responsibility for improving the circumstances of young people in Whittlesea. These benchmarks have been refined and developed over the past two years, and new ones have been incorporated in the recently agreed Five Year Plan.

It is therefore important to review the degree to which these benchmarks and indicators have proved useful, and to examine how robust they have proved to be.

Benchmarks and Indicators

It doesn't matter who claims ownership, so long as things are changing.

Stakeholder

School principals and other key stakeholders report that the data on retention and destinations of early school leavers, generated through the Whittlesea Youth Commitment process, has been extremely useful, particularly in assisting the evaluation of existing programs and provision, and in planning for future services. All those surveyed for this study rated this data as very valuable.

The extent and detail of data that needs to be collected has been a matter of debate within the management group, as it has required a lot of work, especially for the transition brokers. However, recent reports tabled at management meetings have been able to demonstrate the capacity of the Commitment to impact on the circumstances of young people. Relevant data can be a powerful tool for change.

Of the five initial benchmarks established, only those relating to known **destinations** and to **retention** appear to be currently regularly reported against through data collected by the transition brokers. There does not appear to be collections and reporting occurring against increased **employment opportunities**, or **commitment to work-based learning**. Strengthening the **interaction of services** has been subjectively reported to be evolving through mechanisms such as the Community Team.

One measure of the extent to which participating organisations have engaged with the existing benchmarks and indicators can be found through reviewing whether changes have resulted in the way they operate and deal with young people. By this measure, the extent of systems change appears to be concentrated on the participating schools (with new exit procedures, programs and brokers), and to a lesser degree, TAFE (with a new Youth Unit) and Centrelink (adopting a case management model).

As one member of the Management Group commented, *"common benchmarks have not yet really taken shape. We haven't managed to yet progress to a point of individual accountability."*

If basic data such as the number of early school leavers presenting at the participating Job Network providers or JPP is being collected, it is not currently being reported and used to inform other stakeholders or the wider community. Developing indicators requiring other agencies to collect and report progress would provide a much fuller picture of the circumstances of young people in the region, and might actively engage more of the signatories to the Commitment in developing and amending their operations.

Key Finding

- All organisations involved in the Commitment need to be reporting on their contribution to the process on at least an annual basis, to ensure that signing the Spirit of cooperation Agreement is active and meaningful.

The next major step taken in the developing Whittlesea Youth Commitment is the recently agreed Five Year Plan. The Plan incorporates the proposal to *continuously measure the progress made toward meeting the needs of all young people in the region*. Each of the goals under the Five Year Plan has proposed measures that will be used to evaluate progress towards the outcomes desired.

The Five Year Plan

The Five Year Plan will be a key management tool of the Management Group, and contains sound and creative ideas. It has taken a year of development and negotiation with all organisations signing the Spirit of Cooperation Agreement, and is viewed as a significant achievement by many on the key Management Group.

The plan will be used to inform the wider Hume/Whittlesea Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) and provide an opportunity for the knowledge and experience developed through the collaboration of the past three years in Whittlesea to be documented for the LLEN.

While containing many proposals for further development of the Youth Commitment, the Five Year Plan also contains some new benchmarks and data-based indicators that will demonstrate progress against outcomes. The benchmarks and indicators being used to date primarily relate to the performance of the education and training institutions. The quality of the learning environment can be measured to some extent by retention, completion, and truancy rates.

By comparison, most new measures in the Five Year Plan relate to improving the pathway to employment, but many are imprecise and require further development. For example there are proposals for "an increase in number of part-time Apprenticeships" and "decrease in rates of youth unemployment" that are more concrete; but these need to be able to be linked to organisation and agency performance. One urgent need is for measures establishing joint accountability for the preparation of young people for employment (both in and out of school settings). The challenge for representatives is to take the measures back to their organisations and find ways to influence attitudes and approaches.

There is also scope to make greater use of existing data on the health, self reliance and well being of young people in the community. For example, application of the Centre for Adolescent Health's survey on risk and protective factors comparing the well-being of youth populations within local government areas. Data already exists for the Whittlesea LGA, and could be used as a benchmark both for comparison with other regions, for studies with larger samples, and to measure progress within the Whittlesea LGA over time.

9. Relationship with the Local Learning and Employment Network

The Whittlesea Youth Commitment has evolved through a partnership between local agencies with an interest in the welfare of young people in the local community. As a result of jointly exploring what was happening to local young people after their compulsory years of schooling, these agencies have recognised their common responsibility for supporting school leavers to achieve the skills, confidence and ability required to live and work in their community.

Supported by two external agencies with skills in action research, a framework has been progressively established that has gradually transformed a concept of shared responsibility into a series of benchmarks with the potential to measure joint accountability. The time and effort required to bring disparate organisations and sectors together over the past three years has been considerable, but the benefit is evident in the strong sense of ownership of the Commitment process among various organisations, the preparedness to collaborate in a range of associated projects, and the desire to develop a system that accommodates the needs of the full range of school leavers.

Under the WYC, the structures and systems have evolved from the investigation process and the need to change how things were being done. This evolutionary approach contrasts with many other initiatives spanning schools, industry and the broader community that tend to establish the structures and systems first, and then seek to instigate change.

The community-driven basis of the approach has been effective in maintaining enthusiasm and participation among most stakeholders. One of the by-products now achieved through the process is a stable network of individuals skilled and experienced in working within a collaborative action research framework.

It is to be hoped that the incorporation of the Whittlesea Youth Commitment within the Hume Whittlesea LLEN will be managed to ensure that the knowledge and skills of those involved in the Whittlesea process over the past three years are capitalised on and used as a basis for further development.

Key Finding

- In the developing relationship between the Whittlesea Youth Commitment and the Hume Whittlesea LLEN, the platform of integrated support for youth developed through community-led processes in Whittlesea over the past three years should be used to inform and further develop the capacity of agencies to collaborate and integrate their services.

10. What has been Achieved?

2000 was the first full year of implementing the new arrangements of transition teams, transition brokers and systematic follow-up of all school leavers in Whittlesea. The brokers working in the schools provided intensive case management to 284 potential early school leavers. Action plans were developed for those contacted before leaving school, and those who left school were tracked for up to 12 months.

The initial data collected provides some strong indications of achieving significant outcomes for young people.

Table 1. Destinations of Whittlesea Early School Leavers for all terms in 1999 and 2000, as at 28 February the following year. Note: 1999 data excludes one school.

Activity	1999 Survey	%	2000 CASES	%	2000 Survey	%
Unknown	330	59	198	48	89	24
Seeking employment	91	16	91	22	48	13
Training	74	14	69	17	149	40
FT employed	53	10	40	10	31	8
Other employed	3		6	1.5	30	8
Other	7	1	7	1.5	23	6
Literacy / Numeracy					5	1
Interstate	30		43		50	
Other schooling	174		182		205	
Total Exits	762		636		630	
Total early leavers	558	100	411	100	375	100

The 1999 and 2000 data is derived from surveys undertaken by the Whittlesea Youth Commitment transition brokers. The 2000 Cases data is that reported through the schools' administrative system reporting the intended destination of exiting students.

The data collected through systematic telephone surveys (carried out by the transition brokers) details actual destinations of students, as opposed to the CASES departmental data that measures only the "intentions" of students when they leave school. The survey data is a much more accurate measure of the destinations of young people than the information provided to school staff by students at the point of exit from school.

On this basis, there is a significant decline in the number of early school leavers evident in a short period of time. Given that any early school leavers from the local Catholic school were not included in the 1999 survey numbers, the decline may be in excess of one-third of the numbers, reduced from 558 in one year to 375 the next. Many more students are also deciding to continue at school.

This data reflects the statistics kept on the decisions of young people still at school who were referred to see the transition brokers at the eight schools. Of 230 students considering leaving school who meet with the brokers in the second half of 2000, 36 per cent decided to remain at school after this contact.

Just as importantly, the uncertainty surrounding the outcome for early school leavers is being reduced. From 59% of early school leavers having unknown destinations in 1999, and the CASES system reporting 48% of all early school leavers going to unknown destinations, that figure has been reduced to 24% in 2000. From the available data, many of those people whose destinations were "unknown" appear to have actually enrolled with public and private training providers.

The end result is that the agencies participating in the Whittlesea Youth Commitment are now able to focus their collective energies on contacting and assisting the 89 young people in 2000 with an unknown destination, and the 48 seeking employment. The numbers requiring assistance in this area are at a manageable level, opening the possibility that concerted action can now be planned with the involvement of employers, Job Network agencies and Group Training Companies to assist this group.

The Whittlesea Youth Commitment processes made us aware of the inadequacy of our recording and reporting processes (though we knew where a lot of kids had gone through informal networks). We felt we could do much better through formal tracking, and with a transition broker, we had a structure to systematically follow up.

Principal, Thomastown Secondary College

The Impact on Young People

The data already collected indicates some highly positive outcomes for young people as a result of the Whittlesea Youth Commitment. The experiences of early school leavers interviewed confirm the impact of the approach.

Their experiences demonstrate the importance of establishing a relationship with a trusted adult who can assist in reviewing options, developing a realistic plan, and generally helping to navigate the complex arrangements young people encounter once they leave school.

I wouldn't have had a clue, wouldn't have learnt about other options. I would have just gone to Centrelink.....(Those leaving school early) they need the support of coordinators and parents to help them find work and to encourage them. Help them look for options and not just sit at home doing nothing. They need help with resumes and how to find work. They need to talk to someone who knows what they are talking about.

Left school during Year 11 - now in Full-time Traineeship

The assistance that my son got was great because he is a quiet, reserved person who wouldn't talk about anything with family or teachers. It was useful to have somebody provide support outside the family unit as it made him stop, think and listen. The broker's support did him the world of good. He left school in Year 10 and has now completed a TAFE Course in Car Audio Work.

Parent of Early School Leaver

These transition brokers are not teachers. It is their knowledge of the issues facing young people and their awareness of the operations of Centrelink, the Job Network, JPP, New Apprenticeship Centres, TAFE, housing, welfare and general youth services definitely that is critical. The young people who have been referred to the transition brokers before leaving school report a high level of confidence in the information they were provided with, and that the process provides them with realistic options.

Case Study: **Sophie**

Sophie was doing Year 11 at school, but felt as though she was wasting her time.

I didn't want to go right through Year 11 and then find that I had qualifications for something I didn't even want to do, she says. She decided to leave school, get some experience in the workforce for a year, and then decide whether she needed to come back to school or not.

Everyone I had spoken to was telling me it was the wrong thing to do. I think everyone just thought it was the wrong decision for someone of my age.

When Sophie announced her decision to leave school, teachers sent her to see the Transition broker. *I enjoyed talking to her a lot, because she helped me to think about the sort of things I wanted to do and helped me with my confidence to know how to go for jobs. She really encouraged me. I said that I might want to come back to school after a year, and she was really helpful, telling me that I could if I wanted to.*

Her parents were uncertain but eventually decided to let Sophie make the decision. She left school in March, and after a month on holiday staying at her aunt's house, began looking for a job.

She was in for a shock. Despite sending out hundreds of job applications seeking work as an apprentice chef, she was not successful, and often did not even receive a reply. *I applied for about 200 jobs and got turned down for almost everything. I only got three or four interviews. I'm glad the transition broker was involved, otherwise I don't think I would have got through it.*

Mostly she helped me keep my confidence up to go for the interviews. When I got rejected or didn't get a call back, she helped me to bounce back. I think if she hadn't been there to tell me that, I would have given up after my first rejection and just hung around living off my parents.

Eventually Sophie got a job picking and packing mushrooms at a farm not too far from home. *It wasn't my dream job, but it was good money for someone of my age and I really liked the experience of working, and the money.*

While Sophie was working, the Broker stayed in touch and let her know when students were applying for their subjects again for the next year of school.

At the end of the year she decided to return to school, and two days after finishing at the mushroom farm, she started school again. She also started looking for work at weekends and after school hours. Sophie has given up the idea of becoming a chef, and is considering a number of career options including getting into the recording industry.

I want to get my VCE now. I think it was a good decision to go back. Most jobs now – even to be a cleaner or a babysitter – you need qualifications. It was really hard going back and getting used to doing all the schoolwork again. The teachers have been great though. They treat me differently. I think they can see that I have matured a bit because of what I went out and did.

While some young people change their minds and decide to remain at school, those who decide to still proceed to leave school generally do so with a stronger confidence in their knowledge of the systems available to support them, and alternative plans if their preferred option does not eventuate.

I got referred to the broker by the school counsellor and my coordinator. Talking to her (the broker) hasn't changed my mind, but she has made things a lot clearer for me. I've wanted to be an electronics engineer ever since I was little. She asked me how I was going and helped me organise myself so that I could get there. She helped me figure out that if I could not get into university, that I could go to TAFE and get into uni. in the 2nd year. Last year we had contact about every two weeks, but this year less often. My parents like the fact that she keeps me in line. She's been a great help to me. Teachers are too busy to be able to worry about stuff like that.

Year 12 school student

The importance of ensuring that young people leave school with a transition plan and an established relationship with an individual who can support them before they exit is made clear by the experiences of both the young people and the transition brokers. The Brokers report that they have much stronger relationships with young people who they have contacted while still at school than they do when they make contact with former students who exited without seeing a broker.

The following case provided by one broker illustrates the greater difficulties involved in achieving positive outcomes if the young person has left school without a clear plan and awareness of the support available.

He was not referred to me by his secondary school. I began working with him after following him up as a part of the destination survey. When I made contact with him, he was very reserved and explained that he was not involved in any activity at the moment....He had left school at the beginning of his second attempt at Year 10, and he did not follow any exit process when he left school.

Establishing what activity he was interested in proved to be a difficult task.....After following him up on several occasions, he never did follow through any of the pathways that would have assisted him to find further education, training or employment. His mother is concerned about him not being involved in any activity.... I continued to phone him and post him various pieces of information, but he would not return calls even after offering him several employment opportunities. I have invited him in for appointments and I have offered to take him to Centrelink and Job Network organisations. He has chosen not to utilise this service.

Transition broker

Young people have been engaged in the development of the WYC process to a limited extent. Surveys of young people are conducted by the City of Whittlesea's Youth Services to gather information on their employment and education needs and knowledge of support services.

Focus groups have also been conducted to further investigate issues facing young people.

While the development of the Youth Commitment has required the construction of a new system of support by organisations and agencies, there is room for more active involvement of young people in the design, delivery and evaluation of the system. In particular, more use could be made of young people to promote key aspects of the process to their peers.

11. The Role of the Transition Brokers

In 2001, approximately two thirds of all early school leavers are being referred to the transition brokers in the Whittlesea schools. The other third exit school without referral (many of them transferring to other schools or moving interstate / overseas).

The Brokers provide support to those early school leavers seeking assistance for a minimum of 12 months, and in some cases for longer periods of time. Whether this is a sufficient period of support is difficult to determine, given that the destination data reported by Brokers results only from the initial contact after exiting school. The Brokers are actually supporting young people for a much longer period of time. This needs to be reported statistically to determine how stable the destinations of these school leavers actually are.

The current transition brokers are relatively knowledgeable about the education, training, and employment systems and programs. The development of an induction manual for brokers, and recruitment of staff with backgrounds in youth work and employment services assists in developing their knowledge of the service system. Young people contacted and supported by the brokers are very positive about the assistance they offer: In particular, their capacity to provide accurate information, develop options for the school leaver, and help them navigate through the service system are consistently remarked on.

However, the brokers report that they are less confident and knowledgeable about the welfare issues which they frequently encounter in the course of assisting young people. Issues associated with homelessness, drugs, bullying and distress that young people experience often contribute to their decision to leave school. Brokers are in a position to collect this information. This information could be documented and used to strengthen support systems for young people and influence the development of appropriate responses and programs within the school.

Means could be found to collect more information on the reasons that young people are proposing to leave school (not just their destination) to help schools respond appropriately.

Given the data they collect and their knowledge of the needs of their client group, the brokers could potentially have more impact on the school, but need more support to do so. They could potentially have a stronger involvement in working with classes assisting in providing information sessions on pathways, employment preparation, and options.

While they are clearly highly valued within the schools, the profile of the brokers in the school communities is not high. Many students in the schools are unaware of the presence or role of brokers unless and until they are referred to them. Parents have an even lower awareness level.

The current arrangements for management of the brokers are ambiguous and they are left to be self-managing to a large extent, despite support from NIE-CAP and the principals. They face a potentially difficult position in being located within the schools but separate from them. Schools appear to want to incorporate them more as a "part of the school team", yet their effectiveness partially results from their not being part of the teaching system. While induction materials have been developed, stronger levels of professional development support for brokers appear warranted, and could be provided out of term time.

Key Findings

- More structure needs to be provided for the interface between school transition teams and transition brokers, including regular meetings to monitor role duplication and formal feedback on the factors that influence young people to leave school.
- A preferable ratio would be one broker working across two schools to effectively case manage all potential early school leavers needing their services. Planned and structured professional development support is required to optimise the brokers' effectiveness, including arrangements to link them more closely to non-education systems and agencies.

12. MANAGED INDIVIDUAL PATHWAYS (MIP)

The transition brokers currently perform a dual role of case management of potential school leavers, and data collection through tracking those who do leave.

Under the State Government's Managed Individual Pathways program (MIPs), schools have now been provided with funding with explicit brief for tracking the destinations of school leavers, and for the development of individual action plans for students in the post-compulsory years.

Schools in the Whittlesea Youth Commitment have already pooled a portion of their individual MIPs allocation to resource the broker positions (see case study on page 27).

Some schools are also employing a staff member using MIPs funds and it is intended that they will assume the data collection role, leaving the brokers with more time to undertake case management of potential early school leavers and those who have left school requiring further assistance.

The opportunity will then present itself for brokers to be more strongly involved in classroom activities concentrating on employment preparation, assisting with interviewing skills, resume preparation and information provision. One school is already considering an internal career mentoring program for Year 9 students involving both the transition broker and the MIPs officer.

While MIPs implementation is still in the formative stages, there are clearly opportunities to structure a transitional curriculum for those students not intending to proceed to university.

MIPs could also be used as a platform to provide more structure to the relationships between the school transition teams and each broker. Despite having various people within the school contacting students who might be preparing to leave school, there are frequently no scheduled meetings between the transition team members and the brokers, with inevitable overlap and duplication of roles. MIPs could be used to also include stronger coordination of this interface. Rather than individual school approaches to dealing with employment services, MIPs coordination could establish common processes to link students to employment opportunities.

Key Findings

- MIPs funding should be used to ensure that destination tracking is reported for 12 months rather than only short-term destinations.
- The development of individual action plans for year 10 students under MIPs should be linked to their potential continuing use after they leave school.
- The potential for transition brokers to be more systematically involved in structured class activities relevant to employment preparation and needs assessment should be explored.
- Extending the use of MIPs funds by collaboration between schools could construct local programs offering alternative combinations of school and work for students in years 9 and 10 whose needs could be identified through mentoring, case management and action planning activities.

13. IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL EARLY LEAVERS

The "exit processes" established under the Youth Commitment appear to have become progressively more effective over time. The numbers of early school leavers without stable employment or going to unknown destinations without referral to a Transition broker have been significantly reduced within a two-year period.

However, there appear to still be some young people exiting without either a known destination or referral to a transition broker, raising issues about the adequacy of the processes currently used to identify young people likely to leave school early. School staff are reportedly sometimes late in referring clients when the student has already been truanting for some time. In other cases, students cease attending school with little prior warning.

Brokers report that it is much more difficult to establish a relationship with early school leavers that have already left school without having had prior contact.

It's harder to catch them if they have left, if you have never seen them We don't start effectively working in the school until March, when some kids have already gone. We are concentrating on data and statistics till March.

Broker

The following table of most recent available data from the transition brokers suggests that the number of early school leavers, and the percentage of those who do leave going to unknown destinations, continues to decline.

Table 2. Destinations of early school leavers during Terms 1, 2 and 3 in 2000 and 2001 reported by for the 8 schools in the Whittlesea Youth Commitment for respective periods.

Destination	2000	2001
Uncontactable	41	23
Seeking Employment	36	42
Full Time Employed	16	21
Employed Casual/Part-time	23	4
Apprenticeship/Traineeship	38	26
Other Schools / TAFE	79	79
Interstate / Overseas	30	12
Other	3	9
Total	266	216

In Terms 1,2 & 3 of 2001, there were 216 early school leavers, of which 42 are reported to be still seeking employment. Of the 42 early leavers still seeking employment, the transition brokers had been working with 27 before they left school. (i.e. 65 per cent of this group). While some of the other 35 per cent not being worked with may themselves have actively decided not to work with the brokers, a review of the referral processes appears warranted.

Further analysis of the data reported by Brokers suggests that a small but important number of young people are still slipping through the net.

According to brokers, it is often the quieter students that are currently leaving school undetected by the Transition teams and Brokers. The process of developing a transition plan for each student under the Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) program should assist in alerting staff to the possibility that these young people are potential early leavers.

In some cases, parents can also play a role in alerting staff to the potential for their son or daughter to leave school without having provided obvious signs of becoming disengaged. While parents may be detecting changes in the attitude of their children, they need to know about the Youth Commitment and how to engage with key staff within the schools.

An important tool in identifying potential early school leavers has been the introduction of the annual survey seeking notification on those intending to leave school early. A simple and effective tool, this is completed early in the school year. One option could be to suggest that the survey be administered more than once a year: At a minimum, the survey could be applied at least twice a year,

and perhaps early in each term, as part of the Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) program.

The above table also suggests that the Brokers are having an influence in redirecting young people from part-time and casual employment to alternative options.

Key Findings

1. The intention survey used to detect potential early school leavers should be administered several times in the course of a year, and the content should be reviewed to refine the filters used to assess those at risk of early school leaving.
2. Communication strategies focussed on parents need to be developed in schools and reported back to the Management Group. These strategies should seek to actively engage parents in alerting transition team members to undetected students at risk of leaving school early. The regular use of newsletters for inclusion of information and data on the Commitment is recommended.

14. Reliability of Destination Tracking

The tracking and destination data on early school leavers is reported by all parties to have been highly influential in scoping the problem and measuring progress.

Prior to the introduction of the transition brokers, reporting on the destinations of early school leavers was obtained from the CASES system in each school. CASES, the Victorian Department of Education Employment and Training's statistical and administrative reporting system, records a destination for all students leaving before completing Year 12. However, the report actually only records the intentions of exiting students, not their actual destination. The CASES data on the destinations of school leavers has been demonstrated to not be reliable, and to record a high percentage of early school leavers going to "unknown destinations."

The tracking and reporting carried out by the transition brokers in each Term vacation is much more reliable than the CASES system, because the Brokers are reporting 'actual' as opposed to 'intended' destinations.

The destination recorded by the brokers reports the "main activity" of the school leaver, although it is possible the young person may be involved in multiple activities (for example; currently in casual employment, while seeking full-time employment, which would be reported as the former).

However, although the brokers follow up all contactable early school leavers at least twice in the subsequent twelve months, as well as providing support those who need it, the collection and reporting of destination data relates only to the initial follow-up contact the brokers make shortly after the young person formally exits from the school. Therefore, the data that is reported represents only the very short-term destinations of young people. A series of reports on the destinations of one group of early school leavers over a twelve-month period

could develop a much more meaningful picture about the pathways being taken by young people in the region.

Even reporting on this initial destination, the amount of elapsed time between the young person leaving school and the point of contact with the broker can vary enormously, from a matter of weeks in some cases to three or four months at the other extreme. The brokers make the contact with the exited students from the preceding school term during each term vacation. As a result, some young people have only just left school, while others have left up to a complete term earlier. For example, due to reporting arrangements, students who leave early in Term 4 will not be followed up until February the following year, an interval of between four and five months. Thus the data, whilst extremely valuable and a good indicator of achievement, requires further refinement in the collection processes and in developing a capacity to report on the destination of the same individuals at a series of points in time.

Brokers cease to track or support school leavers after they turn 18. This raises the possibility that some young people leaving school during Year 12 without completing the year may also be not receiving support for a sufficient period if they turn 18 during that year or shortly afterwards.

Key Findings

- The destination tracking carried out by the transition brokers has provided reliable and valuable information on the actual destinations of early school leavers in Whittlesea.
- The value of the information would be further improved if reporting was made on the second contact made by Brokers (between six and twelve months after the young person has exited) in addition to the current reporting on the initial contact after leaving school.
- Transition brokers should be sufficiently resourced to support all early school leavers for at least twelve months, including those who turn 18 years of age within that twelve month period.

15. Implementation of the Key Tools

Common Exit Procedures

Rated by schools as the single most important tool developed by the Youth Commitment (as it is the aspect with which they are most engaged), the exit form provides the platform of information for the transition brokers to follow up early school leavers.

Agreement to provide common information has laid the basis for a consistent approach to managing the process across schools. The data collected on the exit forms provides the basis of the CASES information entered on the Department's administrative system, which reports the intended destination of the school leaver.

The exit forms seek information on the intended path upon leaving the school (transfer; employment; tertiary education or seeking employment) but collects no information on the circumstances that might have caused the young person to leave school early. The form and the general exit procedures would be en-

hanced by the sensitive collection of information on the causes of early school leaving.

The School Leavers Guide

All Whittlesea agencies consulted in this study rated the Guide as either very useful or fairly useful.

The School Leavers Guide has provided a resource that is as useful for staff in agencies as it is for young people. Some Job Network providers are giving them to all their clients, not just the Youth Commitment participants. The Guide also serves as a an induction tool for new employees in agencies

For those school leavers who possess the confidence and skills, the Guide is a resource they can use independently.

However, it is not a product that many who leave school early without a concrete destination tend to use on their own. transition brokers actively need to support young people navigating through the complex service system after leaving school, and the Guide serves only as a 'supplement' to the needs of this group.

The possibility of distributing the Guide to the parents of broker clients could be considered as a more effective way of ensuring that the Guide is used as a key resource.

Again, it should also serve as a useful resource in the development of transition plans under the MIPs initiative for all secondary students.

The Education and Training Passport

The education and training passport was developed to ensure that a transition plan is documented for the early school leaver, that their resume details are readily available, and that the ground is established to enable the young person to be tracked through the service system (dependent on their giving permission).

Representatives of the Job Network agencies, Group Training and Centrelink all report that at the present time, the Passport is a well-designed but infrequently used tool. One third of early leavers are currently departing school without referral to a transition broker. In these circumstances, passports are meant to be issued by the transition team members, or failing that, by staff at the first agency to which they subsequently present. The process by which the passports are distributed probably needs to be reviewed and refined, because so many staff in schools and agencies are potentially distributing the passport that it has become a complicated dissemination system.

The result reported by most agencies dealing with early school leavers is that the passport is not effective as a tool (especially among those leaving during Years 9 and 10) because it is generally not used.

We have never had a young person bring their Passport to us when they have needed support, even those who have come because they have been removed from school.

Survey Response - Community Agency

As a result, the approach to the passport needs review. Community agencies, Job Network providers and Centrelink all advise that the passports are being used as the exception rather than the rule. This needs further investigation as to whether this is due to the distribution process or the design, but the indications are that it may be both.

If actually used and presented by the young person, the passports are reported to work as they were intended. Incorporating an introduction to and explanation of the use of the passport within the Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) program could also help improve the use after young people leave school.

However, a trial use of the passport with all Year 10 students from one school as part of their Term 3 careers program has also found that only a small percentage of the students retained, used and returned the passports as directed. These students are reported to have apparently not regarded the passport as a valuable tool.

Key Findings

- If each Community Team agency reported back on the number of times each agency has a passport 'presented' in a fixed period (monthly or quarterly) would provide a more definitive guide to the extent and patterns of use.
- Under the MIPs program, schools could partner with other agencies to re-develop the passport in a more viable form that will be used by young people (for example, an email address developed while at school that provides similar details to those on the passport that could become a portable site).

16. THE EFFECT ON SCHOOLS

The eight schools involved have tangible results to show for their commitment. Retention rates are rising. Students are deciding to stay at school to acquire a higher level of education and more knowledge (attributable both to the brokerage relationship and the development of more flexible program offerings).

One of the reasons that more young people are deciding to stay on at these schools is the increased preparedness of schools to offer more flexible curriculum to selected young people in years 10 and 11 (with emerging combinations permitting part-time work, part-time school and part-time training).

A Year 9 male student was considered to be very likely to leave school. A program is now in place which involves one day a week doing the (TAFE-based) "Lets Look at Work Program", one day a week of work experience and three days at school. This student is now prepared to complete Year 11 (because his work experience employer has advised him to) and to continue with his modified timetable.

Transition broker

The introduction of the Transition team in each school is helping to improve exiting processes.

There is evidence of increased levels of provision of VET programs, including non VCE accredited VET programs in two of the schools. The City of Whittlesea LGA had the highest percentage increase in government sector VET in VCE enrolments in Melbourne in 2000.²²

The Whittlesea Youth Commitment provides schools with the information and framework to develop options to assist young people who have become disenchanted with school environment through offering alternative curriculum.

This young person is in Year 9 and has come to attention because on a few occasions he has been asked to leave the classroom. This young person has generally been polite and cooperative, so this behaviour is quite out of the norm. The principal believes that (this particular) student is uninterested and has discussed an alternative program next year which would involve a larger amount of work experience and the opportunity to develop more work-related skills. I was asked to organise a work experience for the students for the remaining four or five weeks of the school year.

Transition broker

Epping Secondary College, Mill Park Secondary College, and Whittlesea Secondary College are all using a generic Certificate 1 in VET (developed through NIECAP and accredited by the State Training Board in July 1999) to develop educational pathways to encourage identified students in years 9 and 10 to remain in education. These courses provide a flexible structure for young people aged 15 or more to undertake introductory VET programs providing transferable vocational skills. In some schools, greater timetabling flexibility is also accompanying the changes.

We have started looking at our programs to look at developing a greater variety of programs to help kids stay at school. For instance, we have introduced VET Music into the school, and started work on introducing VET Furniture Studies. It has changed the mindset, so that now we are thinking, 'what can we do to keep this kid at school?'

Principal, Lalor North Secondary College

The revised approach within schools is also changing approaches to disciplinary issues. Some principals now refer bored and disengaged students to the Transition broker rather than moving to initially suspend or expel them.

It is also evident that key staff in schools are much more aware of the relevant services that exist to support young people after they leave school. The Community Team has been particularly important in this regard.

I wouldn't have had a clue what the other services out there were. I've lived in the area for 25 years and I had no idea about them. Now I can actually ring someone from a Group Training Company, whom I actually know now, and talk to them about what's needed. Its turned this into a 'personalised' service, and that's been very important.

Careers Teacher, St Monica's College

Despite the broadening of options and the introduction of greater flexibility in programs for students in years 9 and 10, program resources and curriculum opportunities continue to be skewed towards students undertaking the VCE. VET in Schools, structured workplacement, and part-time New Apprenticeships are all targeted at students in the final two years of schooling. Diversifying curriculum options and alternative programs for students in Years 9 and 10 is still small in scale and comparatively limited.

Case Study: **The Whittlesea Township Youth Program**

The actual township of Whittlesea is quite isolated from the surrounding parts of the municipality, with relatively few support services for young people outside the school. The Township Youth Program is an example of an initiative that is linked to but separate from the Youth Commitment, made viable by the range of agencies and services prepared to collaborate to assist young people in the region.

Initiated by the Adult Community and Further Education regional office, a program has been established in the former Maternal and Child Health Centre that was secured by the Whittlesea City Council. The Youth Program is designed both for students from Whittlesea Secondary College in Years 9 and 10 who are at risk of leaving school, and for a number of young people who have already left school without work or any further education.

The program runs for 15 weeks on a full-time basis, and each week comprises one day of training in Horticulture, one day of training in Landscaping, one day of work placement, and two days studying an adapted Certificate of General Education for Adults combined with some personal development activities. Twelve young people started the program and ten are completing in 2001.

The content of the program is delivered by a combination of Kangan Institute of TAFE, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE, a further education provider, youth staff from the City of Whittlesea, and support provided by a youth worker based at the school and other volunteer youth workers. The Whittlesea Youth Commitment provided funding obtained under a special grant from DETYA.

Replicating the Community Team model, a township Community Team has been established made up of employment placement providers, Council youth staff, Centrelink and the Youth Program Coordinator. As well as the agencies providing the training, a Job Network provider, Workplacement, provides services from the Centre one morning a week, and Centrelink have indicated an intention to also provide an outreach service from there in the near future.

A mapping of the programs and resources provided across the Whittlesea LGA to students in the middle years of secondary school compared to those provided to students in the final two years could help to identify potential opportunities for new programs and earlier intervention in employment preparation.

Key Findings

- An audit of the relative resources and variety of program options for the middle years and the senior years of secondary schooling could be undertaken to determine the extent of need for increased attention to providing alternative options for students in Years 9 and 10.
- Anecdotal information suggests that low levels of literacy and numeracy are frequently contributing to the decision of many young people to leave school early in Whittlesea. This issue seems to warrant further investigation, and an Action Research project examining the extent of the problem and the response of education and training providers could develop an improved approach.

17. THE RESPONSE OF TAFE

In response to the need demonstrated by the Youth Commitment, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE established a new Youth Unit to bring together a range of programs and services to meet young people's needs. One of their first initiatives has been to commence delivering the General Certificate 1 in VET for local school students and young unemployed people.²³

The TAFE Institute became involved with a caravan-manufacturing employer that was having difficulty identifying young people interested in employment in the industry. The employer linked up with Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE to do the training, and the employer was directed by the TAFE Institute to the Community Team to help identify young people potentially interested in employment. As a result places were filled through recruitment from the network of agencies working with young people.

Project Coordinator

The Jobs Pathways Programme, JPP in the North, is managed by Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE in conjunction with NIECAP and a Job Network provider. JPP is used as a key referral agency by the transition brokers to place early school leavers into New Apprenticeships and access TAFE. The Institute has supported the role of the transition brokers through providing access to professional development activities and other support. The Lets Look At Work program for Year 10 students, offered at the TAFE Institute under the JPP program funding, is an important option for local schools to allow students at this level to explore vocational options one day a week for a term.

TAFE is also strongly involved in the new Whittlesea Township Youth Program described in the previous case study, delivering training to potential and current early school leavers from Whittlesea Secondary College.

18. THE PATHWAY TO EMPLOYMENT

The strength of the Whittlesea Youth Commitment approach has been taking a systems approach to improving the transition from school to further education training and employment. However, systems change is more easily addressed in the education and training sector, which to some extent already functions as a system. By comparison, the employment services sector functions in a competitive and fragmented manner, especially the Job Network. While individual employers, some Job Network providers, and the local Group Training Company are all signatories to the Youth Commitment, their engagement to date is largely as independent organisations.

To this stage, employers and employment services' engagement with the Youth Commitment is acknowledged by all stakeholders to be tenuous. The available data suggests that there has been little improvement in young people's access to employment under the Commitment. This is partially due to the strong initial focus on supporting young people at school and tracking their pathways. Employers have found it difficult to engage with a process that is primarily about systems change and joint responsibility.

The brokers' comments reinforce what the data suggests: that for early school leavers, finding the connections between Centrelink, the Job Network, Group Training Companies, JPP and ultimately employment remains difficult. The Job Network remains a rarely used option for the early school leaver. The number of steps involved; the time the processes take; and the lack of access to intensive assistance creates barriers for young people. The brokers tend to refer young people to the Jobs Pathways Programme (JPP) and the Victorian Government's Community Business Employment (CBE) Program instead, because they offer a degree of case management. The employment services pathway is complicated for the brokers themselves to understand and stay abreast of. The challenge for the Youth Commitment is to find ways to engage JPP, the Group Training Company and the Job Network to develop new systems to link young people to employment.

The employment services system is not conducive to young people wanting to move from school to employment. Young people on Youth Allowance are not able to access job seeking assistance under the Job Network without leaving school first and becoming unemployed for the requisite period.

For Job Network providers the resource-rich end of their service spectrum is to work with and place the long term unemployed. There are few incentives for placing young people exiting school into employment. The lack of direct incentives for Job Network and employers to develop new systems to link young people, especially early school leavers, to employment creates difficulties for low skilled young people seeking to access the labour market. One of the main challenges for the Whittlesea Youth Commitment stakeholders is to overcome the barriers created by the government's employment service system.

The brokers attempt to overcome the fragmentation of the pathway to employment by "holding the hand" of young people to guide them through the initial contacts with Centrelink and employment placement agencies.

To access Flex 3 (intensive assistance) is a slow process, and there are too many steps along the way. Those kids who want it and need it require immediate help. Even with the hand-holding its too difficult for most of them, so we would go to JPP and CBE because of their case management.

Transition broker

There are some examples emerging of attempts to create a more connected pathway to employment. Processes being negotiated between one of the local Job Network agencies (Sarina Russo Job Access) and the transition brokers are developing a support system for school leavers who may not be eligible for financial assistance through Centrelink, but are seeking employment and can potentially be assessed as requiring intensive assistance. Playing a defacto brokerage role through the employment services, Sarina Russo Job Access is arranging for Centrelink to provide assessment and tracking of young people through the employment service sector. The young people retain the capacity to select the Job Network provider of their choice, but are actively linked to the services for which they are eligible. Part of the process has involved identifying a specific officer within Centrelink to deal with the young school leavers referred to the agency by Sarina Russo Job Access and the transition brokers.

Sarina Russo Job Access also support students still at school access part-time work by feeding information on part-time vacancies through NIECAP for distribution to schools through the careers teacher network.

Inner Northern Group Training provide another example of an agency routinely circulating employment and training opportunities directly to schools within the Whittlesea Youth Commitment. St Monicas College is one school that finds the direct provision of these vacancies to be very valuable in bridging the gap between school and work. The new Five Year Plan includes the proposal that "employment vacancies should be sent regularly from all providers to careers teachers and brokers."

One of the areas for exploration is to negotiate more flexibility in the access to pre-apprenticeships. Pre-apprenticeship courses are a key pathways for early school leavers to access New Apprenticeships, and other forms of employment. For young people in Whittlesea, these pre-apprenticeships are generally accessed through TAFE providers (mainly Northern Melbourne Institute; and to a lesser extent Kangan Institute and Victorian University of Technology). The relative inflexibility of commencement dates for these pre-apprenticeships is noted by transition brokers. If a student leaves school in the course of the year, they may have to wait several months before a pre-apprenticeship program starts and a place is available. Ways to explore create more flexibility on the commencement of classes or the modes of delivery could assist to bridge these students into training more effectively.

Part-time Apprenticeships for secondary students have proved difficult to organise, and the numbers of participants remain very low in Whittlesea. They have not been supported either by many employers or by interested students.

The initial work conducted under the Youth Commitment has confirmed that there are large deficiencies in the work preparedness of young people leaving the school system. Part-time work provides school students with important experience and skills to help prepare them for employment and broader community life after school. According to Job Network agencies, employers and tran-

sition brokers, the combination of school and part-time work provides a stronger preparation for subsequent employment.

Lots of employers tell me, 'If you can find me a kid who has worked part-time at McDonalds, I'm sure they will be fine.' We have lots of casual and part-time work available, some terrific opportunities, but no kids available.

Job Network representative

The larger challenge is to find a way to allow the Job Network agencies and Group Training to help shape the agenda, and to develop common benchmarks that are relevant to the operation of publicly funded employment services in particular.

Key Findings

- Current examples of direct links being established between employment services providers and schools, through notifications of vacancies, engagement in employment preparation activities, and helping develop flexible program options combining study and work should be systematically pursued and implemented between employment services and all schools.
- As the progressive implementation of MIPs provides resources to manage the collection and reporting of data on the destinations of early school leavers, the role of the transition brokers could be repositioned to continue in their case management role and develop their capacity to perform more brokerage across the employment services and Centrelink in a more systematic way.

The View of Employers

The transition brokers are having an impact on the quality of the kids coming through that process. They have higher self-esteem and awareness of the requirements of the employment market. Also, the kids are making better choices.

Local employer

With most Youth Commitment activity impacting on school retention and training participation, employers' involvement has been limited to this stage, although representatives signing the Spirit of Cooperation Agreement have continued to participate in the Employer Roundtable that is regularly convened.

Some specific employment initiatives have resulted already. Whittlesea City Council employed six trainees from the early school leaver group as part of their support for the Commitment.

Business mentoring has also been organised for newly appointed employees/apprentices in the local furniture industry.

The commitment of employers to supporting young people in Whittlesea can take a number of forms. This includes making part-time employment available to students, participating in work-placement programs, and assisting education and training providers develop new program arrangements that could transfer learning from the school setting to the workplace under different arrangements.

Case Study: **Graphics Unlimited**

Graphics Unlimited, a member of the Whittlesea Youth Commitment, was seeking to recruit young people into the printing industry, but was experiencing difficulty as awareness of the industry was low and there is no VET in Schools program offered for this industry. In an innovative solution that involved the cooperation of a number of the members of the Youth Commitment, Graphics Unlimited approached the Inner Northern Group Training Company for assistance to promote the opportunity within the schools. A flyer was distributed to the schools inviting interested students seeking part-time work in Graphic Design, Film Making and Offset Printing to an information evening at the company.

The Group Training Company interviewed students expressing interest, and then an information evening was held at the company. Ten students attended the session, and five accepted the offer of after hours part-time work. Graphics Unlimited provided the part-time workers with training to the students from years 10, 11 and 12. Two of these students have subsequently been taken on as apprentices within the company.²⁴

The benchmark of employer commitment to work-based learning requires further development. Growth in structured work-placement opportunities is more dependent on student interest and demand than on the commitment of employers to providing opportunities. Local coordinators report that the overwhelming majority of employers are prepared to offer workplacements for students on request, and that growth in workplacements has resulted from increased student demand. Low part-time New Apprenticeship numbers are the result of both low demand and low employer take-up.

If the “commitment” of employers relates more to their preparedness to participate in developing new forms and structures of work-based learning, then benchmarks need to be developed that reflect their support for these processes. In particular, exploration of the extent to which learning could be transferred from the school setting to the workplace under different arrangements.

Key Findings

- Part-time employment for school students is an important component of employment preparation, and use of a measure of part-time employment while students are still at school should be developed and reported against.
- Reporting is also needed against benchmarks established for increasing employment, apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities to focus attention in these areas.
- Despite a number of local employers signing up to the WYC, and participating in employer roundtables, the level of engagement remains relatively low. Examples of new initiatives creating local employment opportunities for young people remain isolated. Progress might be facilitated by identify-

ing one or two industry sectors with identified potential for the employment of young people, and then working collaboratively with economic development agencies, employers and other relevant services to construct pathways and appropriate support systems.

- An employment strategy that focuses on a few key industry sectors with high employment potential for young people (such as retail and construction) could allow a targeted approach to both employers and to the development of programs and support structures. There are also some useful examples of strategies linking schools and local employers that could be effectively promoted to these sectors.

19. CHANGES AT CENTRELINK

As a result of their participation in the Whittlesea Youth Commitment, Centrelink's Epping Office has changed their mode of operation in dealing with schools and early school leavers, adopting a "case manger" approach to working with schools. A specific officer has been allocated to deal with each school, so that a personal relationship and responsibility can be developed, and communication facilitated. The approach has been adopted to maximise the capacity of students to remain at school by ensuring that they and their families are receiving the appropriate financial support. This approach is now being adopted by Centrelink Offices in other regions.

'Centrelink on Campus' has also evolved out of the Whittlesea Youth Commitment, with various Centrelink Offices in the wider region providing services on campus at RMIT.

I have worked in other Centrelink Offices, where all the agencies all worked independently of each other. You could see all these agencies with huge areas of overlap all doing their own thing. Here there is much more joint knowledge and collaboration.

Manager Centrelink

Centrelink have also set up referral protocols with the local police, in an attempt to try to reconnect those young people who have lost contact with the education system and have not found a pathway to employment. Through the police, Centrelink are trying to identify those young 'disconnected' young people and link them back into support services.

20. THE INVOLVEMENT OF COMMUNITY AGENCIES

While the Youth Commitment processes have achieved demonstrable success in retaining early school leavers in education and training, and providing support to those in the process of leaving school, less has been done to find and reconnect young people who have already been 'lost' from the system. The tools and processes developed to date have not connected or impacted on this group of young people, and only marginally on the community agencies that work with them.

Agencies such as Whittlesea Housing have also found the Community Team meetings helpful, with improved contact with workers in other agencies. In particular, young people presenting to Whittlesea Housing as homeless have been able to be supported and be kept in school.

Centrelink have developed referral protocols with the local police with the intention of identifying those young people already 'lost' between leaving the education system and employment, some of whom are already long term unemployed by the age of 16 or 17. The Police refer appropriate young people to the Centrelink social worker to connect them to appropriate support and benefits. Similar links are also being explored with Juvenile Justice and youth support agencies.

As a result of their participation on the Community Team, local police dealing with young people have indicated they have a stronger awareness of the complex issues facing early school leavers, and a better knowledge of the support available to young people.

In general though, the community agencies that are signatories to the Spirit of Cooperation Agreement find few points at which they can connect to the Youth Commitment process at present, other than through the Community Team meetings.

21. THE ROLE OF NIECAP

The Northern Interactive Education Area Program (NIECAP) is part of the RMIT University Community and Regional Partnerships. Situated at the Bundoora campus of the university, NIECAP seeks to build partnerships between the university, schools, industry, training organisations and the community within Melbourne's northern region. A particular focus of NIECAP's work is the transition of young people from school into post compulsory education, training or employment, and their action research projects and school and industry activities are conducted in this context.

Their role includes coordination of workplacements for school, VET professional development for teachers, and the development and distribution of newsletters and publications. This positioned NIECAP very well to provide a bridge between schools, post-secondary education and training providers, and industry.

NIECAP has therefore been able to provide a multi-faceted facilitation function in helping initiate and then support the Youth Commitment. Its co-location and close relationship with the Area Consultative Committee helped to source additional resources and strengthen links with employers and industry.

The key functions NIECAP provides to the Youth Commitment are:

Research Capacity

The development of a base of information, data, and analysis through conducting the ACC-funded projects that demonstrated the need and sparked the interest of other agencies in pursuing the concept of a Youth Commitment.

Project Coordination

From the outset, NIECAP provided executive support to the key coordinating functions of the Youth Commitment, including the Management Committee, the Community Team, stakeholder meetings and overseeing the brokers. This role has recently been incorporated within the new arrangements for the Hume Whittlesea LLEN. Major aspects of the project coordination included the development of work plans; overseeing the development of the key tools required, and the coordination of data collection and statistical reporting.

Managing Communications

Keeping the signatories to the Whittlesea Youth Commitment informed and engaged in the process has also been an important part of the role. The communication with the main stakeholders has been handled well, according to most agencies involved. The Infolink newsletter is emailed to all agencies that are part of the Whittlesea Youth Commitment; as well as convening the regularly scheduled stakeholder meetings Community Team meetings.

22. EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNICATION

Most stakeholders rate the strategies used in communicating with the various stakeholders as fairly effective, with the most positive rating given to communication with agencies participating in the Commitment.

Some of the existing communication mechanisms such as the emailed Infolink could be turned into stronger reporting and accountability tools rather than just used as an information channel.

The communication strategy for schools is fairly well developed, and includes the provision of briefings for all teachers in the 8 schools; the development of a briefing kit; and an induction session at the start of the year for new teachers. Nonetheless, principals and careers teachers advise that most classroom teachers would have a 'minimal' knowledge of the WYC and what it involves. The implementation of MIPs provides the opportunity to deepen the knowledge and understanding of the Commitment more deeply through the school staff.

Communication with young people and their families has been less effective, and general awareness of the Youth Commitment, or the existence of transition brokers, is low until young people are specifically referred to the brokers for assistance. The involvement of parents can be important in detecting the early warning signs of potential early school leaving before teaching staff are aware of it. The majority of the young people who were contacted through this study indicated that they were not aware of the transition brokers prior to being referred to see them. More effective use could be made of young people to create greater awareness of the role of the transition brokers within the schools.

However, once brokers start working with young people, and their parents are contacted, the parents are almost uniformly highly supportive.

As previously noted, communication has not effectively engaged employers and business. Some of the community agencies also report that communication and engagement with youth workers in the community has not been effective, despite the operation of the Community Team.

23. THE MAIN LESSONS

Two and a half years have passed since the idea of a Youth Commitment was first canvassed at meetings in Whittlesea, and about eighteen months since the first Spirit of Cooperation agreement was signed. Although it sounds like a long time, much of it has been spent negotiating, innovating, and putting in place the systems needed. The impact is only now beginning to be demonstrated. But some important lessons have already been learnt.

First, negotiating and formalising joint accountability for outcomes through the initial Spirit of Cooperation Agreement and now a new Five Year Plan establishes common responsibility for outcomes, and enables sectors and organisations to begin to share data and information more openly. There is now a stronger preparedness to exchange information than existed before the initiation of the Youth Commitment.

Second, the emphasis on collecting data and measuring impact has played two important roles. One is to actually quantify the extent of the issues for agencies with a responsibility or interest in the welfare of young people. The other is to enable those organisations and others to have a basis for deciding whether progress is being made. This has seen a strong focus on collecting data, providing feedback, and regular reporting against benchmarks within the community.

Third, the experience of the past two years confirms the effectiveness of the role of the transition brokerage. Already piloted in other settings in Melbourne by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, the application of the model in Whittlesea across eight schools have contributed significantly to achieving increases retention and decreasing the numbers going to "unknown" destinations. Young people referred to the brokers before leaving school are highly positive about the quality of information and level of support they have received.

Fourth, that it is difficult for agencies and organisations with responsibilities for direct service delivery to young people (schools, community centres, TAFE providers, welfare agencies, etc) to continue to provide those services, maintain their accountabilities to their funding sources, and be able to simultaneously develop a new framework at a community and regional level. The strong involvement of the City of Whittlesea, the Area Consultative Committee, NIE-CAP and the Dusseldorp Skills Forum, has collectively provided the framework, the information and the 'glue' that has enabled the service providers to begin slowly change the way they "do business".

Fifth, that benefits result from having to find funding and resources from various levels of government and other forms of contributions. This "cocktail" of support ensures that the capacity to experiment and collaborate is not unduly inhibited by the requirements of a particular government department or sponsor to deliver outcomes in timeframes determined by parties outside the community.

Sixth, of the benchmarks established in the formative stages of the Youth Commitment in 1999, three are showing clear indications of an improved situation, while two need closer attention. The benchmarks were:

Benchmark	Comment on Progress
1. Reducing the numbers of "unknown destinations" being reported	Data indicates dramatic improvement
2. Increasing the retention of young people in full-time education and training	Improvement being reported by schools and evident in data collection
3. Increasing employment opportunities for young people	Limited evidence of any progress to date.
4. Increasing employer commitment to work-based learning	Little evidence to indicate progress
5. Strengthening the interaction of services	Reported by stakeholders in all sectors being achieved through the Community Team and other transition mechanisms.

And finally, that there remains much to be done, particularly to improve the pathway to employment for those who decide to leave school for job rather than training or further education. Finding ways to improve the connectedness of Centrelink, the Job Network and employers; and more creative ways to develop systematic access to employment for the young remains a significant challenge.

Many students intending to leave school before completing Year 12 remain very under prepared and poorly skilled to find stable employment. While the role of the transition broker includes counselling and provision of information to provide options, they have also needed to assist in providing job search training for early school leavers. Literacy and numeracy problems are frequently evident, and the opportunities to provide a remedy through training programs are in short supply. Leaving school early to find a job remains a high-risk strategy for many young people.

Representatives of organisations in the Whittlesea Youth Commitment acknowledge that some elements have worked better than others have, and that they are still casting around for solutions to many shortcomings in the transition process.

But the benefits for young people in Whittlesea are real, and are beginning to be demonstrated.

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APPENDIX 1 SIGNATORIES TO THE WHITTLESEA YOUTH COMMITMENT IN 2000

Employers

Bostik Australia
Tieman Industries
Graphics Unlimited
Inner Northern Group Training
Whittlesea Business Link
Apprenticeships Victoria
Furniture Industry Association of Australia
Furniture Training Victoria
Stambos Food Services
Selectrix Pty Ltd
Anderson Multiplex Cinemas

Job Network

WorkPlacement
RMIT Priority Employment
Leonie Green & Associates
Salvation Army Employment Plus
Sarina Russo Job Access (Aust)

Government Agencies

Centrelink - Epping
Northern Area Consultative Committee (ACC)
Department of Education Northern Region
Adult Community and Further Education (Northern Region)

University

RMIT University

TAFE

Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE

Schools

Epping Secondary College
Lalor Secondary College
Lalor North Secondary College
Mill Park Secondary College
Peter Lalor Secondary College
St Monica's College
Thomastown Secondary College
Whittlesea Secondary College

Community Agencies

Kildonan Child and Family Services
Plenty Valley Community Health Centre

APPENDIX 2 CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WHITTLESEA YOUTH COMMITMENT

Various parties contributed to the resourcing and the concepts underpinning the Whittlesea Youth Commitment.

- Through the Area Consultative Committee, initial commonwealth RAP grants were accessed that provided for some of the establishing infrastructure costs, supported the initial "Action-Research" approach and focussed on the skill development and employment issues for young people.
- The Dusseldorp Skills Forum contributed funding at critical points to extend the work of the brokers, and to maintain the role of transition brokers at an interim stage.
- The City of Whittlesea has helped to the development of some of the key tools including the production and updating of the School Leaver's Guides and the Passports.
- Resourcing has come from the following sources in the two and a half years to March 2001, when the LLEN started to operate.

(Source: "It Can Be Done": Whittlesea Youth Commitment Report. Sept 2000, City of Whittlesea).

Northern ACC (RAP Funding)	\$250,000	(Project coordination 1999-2001)
City of Whittlesea	\$ 40,000	(Materials printing; youth surveys)
Dusseldorp Skills Forum	\$ 80,000	(Interim transition brokers funding)
Dept of Education	\$ 28,000	(Original transition broker funding)
Schools	\$ 8,000	(Original transition broker funding)
School Focussed Youth Service	\$ 14,000	(Original transition broker funding)

- The Whittlesea Youth Commitment coordination arrangements are now being incorporated into the new Hume Whittlesea LLEN.
- Three current Transition broker positions have been funded until early 2002 through a total contribution of \$ by government schools of their Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) allocated funding, topped up by a contribution of \$10,000 from Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE.
- The Dusseldorp Skills Forum also contributed some of the key concepts, including the transition broker; early school leaving intentions surveys; the idea of a structured "Spirit of Cooperation" agreement; and the need for measurement and benchmarks.
- NIECAP also contributed some key concepts, including the formation of the community team; and the design and use of the Passport.
- Individual service agencies also contributed elements of the new approach. The school exiting procedures were a blend of documentation and process already in place in several schools, and were integrated to form a new system.

APPENDIX 3 THE WHITTLESEA YOUTH COMMITMENT FIVE YEAR PLAN



The Whittlesea Youth Commitment is a unique community initiative that addresses youth unemployment in the region. Its aim is to ensure that every young person leaving school in the City of Whittlesea, especially those who leave before completing VCE or its equivalent, make a smooth transition between education and further training or employment.

The aim of the WYC is to contribute to a student centred, high performance education and training provision, which will be achieved by

- Meeting the requirements of all young people in the education and training system
- Providing assistance with the transition between school and employment
- The regional community taking responsibility for the welfare of its young people by improved collaboration between agencies
- Improved links between employers and young people
- Continuously measuring the progress made toward meeting the needs of all young people in the region.

Vision Statement

The broad vision of the WYC is to enhance the capacity of young people in Whittlesea to be active, independent citizens. In partnership with young people, the WYC will be a demonstration of the level of community engagement in expanding work and learning opportunities in Whittlesea.

Purpose of the 5 Year Plan

The Whittlesea Youth Commitment is a long-term community based initiative, which promotes the desire of the community to secure real change for the benefit of young people.

Whilst the plan outlines a number of key areas upon which achievements can be evidenced, it is a dynamic document and therefore ultimately a rolling five year plan. The plan answers the questions – where are we going?, how will we get there?, how will we engage with each other and others to meet the needs of young people within the region?

Despite the significant achievements of the last two years, the WYC is just beginning to articulate the issues faced by young people within our community, and to understand the possibilities that stem from collaboration, goodwill and collective experience.

Proposed Key Areas

In order to meet the needs of young people in education and training and their transition to employment we will address a number of key areas which include:

- Youth
- Learning Environments
- Employment Pathways
- The Safety Net
- Building Relationships
- Research

Use of the plan

The plan will be used by the governing body of the WYC as a key management tool. The work plan of the governing body and secretariat will be for the most part derived from the 5 year plan. To ensure achievement against goals the 5yr plan will be on the agenda at each meeting of the governing body, which will be responsible for the realisation of the plan. The Plan will be the basis of negotiation with the Hume/Whittlesea Local Learning and Employment Network for priority projects for the Whittlesea LGA within the LLEN. However, as a first principle, funds to achieve this plan should come from participating organisations through a reorganisation of current resources and through attracting funds to the relevant sector to achieve WYC goals through mainstream channels. LLEN funds would then be sought for those priority projects which do not fall into these categories.

The implementation, active monitoring and review of the 5yr plan will support the WYC in the continued development of a shared understanding and ownership, by all participating organisations, of the WYC purpose and strategic directions. Progress against goals will be reported to participating organisations twice a year.

Management and Sustainability Strategy

In order to ensure the sustainability of the WYC the interim management group is charged with developing a governing structure for the WYC.

The interim management group and the future governing body are also charged with developing funding arrangements that secure the long-term sustainability of the WYC. This will include developing financial partnerships amongst stakeholders, encouraging cooperative submissions for funding, securing additional funds, lobbying government and securing a long term funding base for the transition brokers.

Understanding and interpreting the policy environment and context in which the WYC operates in order to maximise funding opportunities and influence policy directions will also form a part of the work of the governing body.

More importantly however, the WYC will only be sustained by the continued commitment by the all-participating stakeholders, acting both individually and collectively as a community of interest.

Suggested Key Area: YOUTH		
<i>Vision Statement: The WYC will be youth driven, focused and responsive</i>		
Proposed Goals <i>What should we do?</i>	Proposed Actions <i>How should we do it?</i>	Proposed Outcomes/Measures <i>How will we know we have done it?</i>
1 Develop structures and processes that engage young people in the development of the WYC	All processes are evaluated by young people and fed back to modify and improve processes	Focus groups organised
	Regular focus groups and surveys of young people in both: -school settings and -out of school settings	Surveys conducted Timely response and feedback to young people on issues raised by young people Results documented and put to WYC stakeholders Evidence of responses to issues raised by young people
2 Ensure that the WYC is guided by input from young people	Organised events with particular youth focus (eg industry vi sits) Systematic collection of data from young people attitudes to school, other educational settings, transition brokers, career aspirations; social issues such as drug and alcohol use and family pressures	Events organised Documentation of processes, survey and focus group formats and number of young people participating Analyse case notes from Transition Brokers on an annual basis to identify trends in issues raised by students considering leaving early Use Whittlesea Youth Network as a source of young people for research Teachers noted that Government sector school middle years surveys will contribute to our knowledge of issues i mpacting on younger students

Suggested Key Area: LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Vision Statement: A quality high performance system that is inclusive of the diversity of all young people's needs

Suggested Goals	Proposed Actions	Proposed Outcomes/Measures
<p>1 The availability of a range of learning environments that are inclusive of the diversity of young people's needs</p>	<p>Mapping of provision, and settings</p> <p>Identify gaps in provision and services</p> <p>Establish structures for joint planning for the needs of young people in the region</p> <p>Establish an 'alternative setting' in the City which builds on good practice elsewhere such as The Island in Collingwood</p>	<p>Identified gaps in provision are filled over agreed timeline</p> <p>No of schools offering diverse programs especially at yr 9 & 10</p> <p>Community providers and TAFE offering programs and settings attracting 15 – 18/19yr olds</p> <p>% increase in retention rate % decrease in truancy rates % increase in completion rates in modules/certificates etc</p>
<p>2 The availability of comprehensive career guidance/employment preparation in all schools</p>	<p>Pool Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) and other resources to provide greater flexibility in curriculum across local schools, and to improve community liaison for students who are 'at risk' so that these students spend more time out of school in valued activities eg volunteer work; work placements etc</p> <p>Develop industry involvement in school Career Preparation Programs</p> <p>Establish a working group to develop a model of best practice, seek funding for and run a pilot program</p> <p>Establish a set of good practice principles for the design of courses/services for young people in the city</p>	<p>MIPs funds pooled for priority projects</p> <p>Best practice model established; pilot program running; number of schools/guidance officers involved</p> <p>Young people can make informed decisions on training, jobs and careers</p> <p>Schools' curricula incorporate a broad Career Preparation Program</p>

<p>3 Develop links with industry in areas of skill shortages</p>	<p>Provide structured work placements in these areas</p> <p>Work with NIECAP, NIETL and similar organisations to improve links with industry</p>	<p>Teachers and parents are aware of a broad range of career paths</p> <p>Industry has active involvement in School Career Preparation Programs</p> <p>Reduction in skill shortages in industry</p>
<p>4 Ensure smooth transition from school to work or/and education and training for young people leaving school including more feedback from TAFE to Brokers about progress of exiting students</p>	<p>Improved links between TAFE and Brokers/schools so that if courses discontinue or a student drops out of TAFE, the College lets a Broker/referral school know for immediate follow-up; or TAFE provides transition support to students who drop out</p> <p>Further develop the role of transition workers in schools within the region More brokers are needed - use a survey to assess demand each year; develop group work eg the Transition Broker Team itself; attach work readiness; job search; provide opportunities to attach Brokers to an appropriate team in each school; provide professional support to brokers</p> <p>Provide ongoing feedback to all school staff about the progress of exited students, and provide detailed case studies of how the broker worked with students to (a) keep them in school (b) assist a managed exit process</p>	<p>Transition workers' role refined and integrated into recurrent school activity</p> <p>Measurable increase in the number of young people using transition passports and staying within the education/training provision or employment opportunities</p>

Suggested Key Area: EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS		
Vision Statement: A system that is effective in providing experience and knowledge that allows employment and life long learning		
Proposed Goals	Proposed Actions	Proposed Outcomes/Measures
<p>1 The development of an employment brokerage that aggregates casual and part-time employment opportunities into sustainable employment</p>	<p>Undertake feasibility of such an employment brokerage with employers, regional bodies and job network</p> <p>Send all employment vacancies to careers teachers in schools and to brokers</p>	<p>Feasibility study completed</p> <p>Employment vacancies sent regularly from all providers</p>
<p>2 Reconcile the needs of young people and employers in order to maximise employment opportunities for young people</p> <p>and</p> <p>ensure that the WYC is guided by input from employers and employer organisations</p>	<p>Accredit part-time work undertaken by school students through work place assessment</p> <p>Stronger community involvement in schools' Career Education Programs</p> <p>Regional careers/industry information evenings for parents, students and teachers</p> <p>Provide more exposure for teachers to local employment opportunities for their students via industry visits by teachers</p> <p>Regular focus group meetings of employers</p> <p>Have a community careers expo</p> <p>Brokers bring students together from different schools for group work</p> <p>NSIN and schools to facilitate increase in VET opportunities with business and industry Business and industry with skill shortages to be targeted for VET placements</p>	<p>Increase in the number of part-time New Apprenticeships</p> <p>Increased employer participation in the WYC</p> <p>Events organised</p> <p>Decrease in skill shortages</p>

	<p>Brokers and Job Network agencies implement strategies that ensure school leavers seeking employment receive the desired level of assistance</p> <p>School curriculum and Career Preparation programs inform students of pre-requisites for likely career paths</p> <p>Develop strategy to approach DEWRSB to introduce new policy that provides immediate Intensive Assistance for all unemployed young people</p> <p>Job Network agencies provide statistics on numbers of young people placed in employment; and numbers still seeking employment at each agency</p> <p>Develop a 'Basic Skills Centre' which focuses on preparing young people for work</p> <p>Involve employers in specific projects rather than a Reference Group; or involve Industry Groups rather than individual employers</p> <p>Survey employers re</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. recruitment (ages; types of employment; frequency) b. ability to /interest in offering work placement to young people 	<p>Increase in job placement rate of school- leavers</p> <p>Decrease in youth unemployment</p> <p>Young people have skills to achieve career objectives</p> <p>Job Network agencies have an incentive to assist all young people to find employment</p> <p>Quarterly collection of statistics from each Job Network agency</p> <p>Exposure of young people to a broad range of opportunities / work / materials / processes</p>
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<p>3 Coordinated career guidance and pathways across WYC organisations</p>	<p>Extend vocational pathways programs to including Certificate 1 courses from Year 9</p> <p>Extend work experience from the traditional two weeks to a variety of workplacement opportunities such as one day a week for a term or more, according to the needs of each student</p> <p>Establish a practice firm</p> <p>Expand number and range of VET placements particularly in skill shortage areas</p> <p>Effective communication and coordination between transition brokers and job network agencies</p>	<p>Working group established to look at effective and possible work placement for school students interested in community sector as a future career At present agencies are inclined to say no because of confidentiality issues However, some young people express a clear interest in this career</p> <p>Measurable increase in the number and length of work experience availability</p> <p>A database is established of employers in the City of Whittlesea who are interested and involved</p> <p>Practice firm established and maintained by WYC Stakeholders</p> <p>Placements are expanded</p> <p>Increase in job placement rate for young people</p>
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Suggested Key Area: THE SAFETY NET

Vision Statement: A system of strategies and services that provides ongoing support for young people facing multiple barriers

Proposed Goals	Proposed Actions	Proposed Outcomes/Measures
<p>1 Ensure WYC outreach to isolated or disengaged young people within the City of Whittlesea that facilitates the re-integration into education, training and employment</p>	<p>Identify, locate and work with these young people through direct contact with services and agencies and by using the Passport</p> <p>Get email addresses of young people</p> <p>Identify most appropriate way of conducting dialogue/assistance</p> <p>Regular meetings of key agencies that young people access</p>	<p>Services and agencies engage this group</p> <p>Establishment of programs which focus on the unmet needs of the young person</p> <p>Improved links between young people and their community and with local employment options</p>
<p>2 Maintenance of the Community Team Model as a safety net for young people</p>	<p>Make explicit that the Community Team provides space for brokers to work with/build relationships with agencies and for professional relationships to develop across sectors</p> <p>Track young people for longer than twelve months</p> <p>More integrated services</p> <p>Mentoring Program to link young people with community members to improve self esteem and awareness of career opportunities</p>	<p>Calendar of meeting times circulated</p> <p>Community Team continue to expand activities to include integrated service delivery</p>

Suggested Key Area: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Vision Statement: A community collaborating effectively to maximise services to young people

Goals	Actions	Outcomes / Measures
<p>1 To further develop collaborative arrangements and relationships amongst WYC stakeholders in order to improve the provision of services to young people in the region</p>	<p>Conduct forums, which engage stakeholders with common charters to integrate and improve services to young people</p>	<p>Forums conducted and evaluation completed</p>
<p>2 To build relationships with government, industry and community agencies that expands the sphere of influence for the work of the WYC</p>	<p>Inform and engage government, industry and community agencies in the work of the WYC There should be a higher profile for the WYC in the community</p>	<p>Information sessions, visits etc conducted</p>
<p>3 Deepen understanding and ownership of the WYC within and across stakeholder organisations</p>	<p>Develop a program within stakeholder organisations that inform and involve staff in the WYC</p>	<p>Visits conducted</p>
<p>4 Develop a marketing and communications strategy that promotes and informs the community about the WYC</p>	<p>Regular column in the local paper</p>	

Suggested Key Area: RESEARCH

Vision Statement: A knowledgeable and informed community effectively responding to the needs of young people

Goals	Actions	Outcomes / Measures
<p>1 To build a research base within the city of Whittlesea that provides all WYC stakeholder with data that contributes to the performance of stakeholder organisations to service young people in the region</p>	<p>Develop service/program benchmarks for individual stakeholders/sectors</p> <p>Develop sets of baseline data within the region</p> <p>Develop common assessment instruments to measure stakeholder and system performance</p> <p>Collation and reporting of data to WYC stakeholders</p> <p>Translate existing data so that it is accessible and meaningful to stakeholders</p> <p>Link WYC research with Youth Network research needs</p>	<p>Stakeholder reports against benchmarks presented annually</p>
<p>2 To build the capacity of WYC stakeholders to undertake effective data collection that contributes to work of the WYC</p> <p>To encourage WYC stakeholders to develop assessment, evaluation and program improvement practices that ensure that programs and services are responsive to student demand</p>	<p>Analyse trends in school attachment and career interests available from Brokers through their work with students and with those who have left; reflect this information back to education and employment sector for program and recruitment review</p> <p>Undertake longitudinal research on outcomes for those who were assisted; reasons for positive outcomes</p>	<p>Inclusion of commitment to WYC in the annual plans of organisation</p> <p>Research with parents of young people assisted by brokers to determine what difference this made</p>