

Lessons from Slingshot

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**A report by the
Equity Research Centre Inc.
for Slingshot**

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for Slingshot

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Executive Summary

The Slingshot program

Slingshot was designed to assist young people who have an interest in running their own business to learn relevant skills and to explore the opportunities presented by self-employment. Slingshot was established in metropolitan Melbourne in June 2001 and in the three years to mid 204 89 young people participated in the program. Slingshot's participant target was young people aged 18 to 24 years old who might otherwise not have the opportunity to establish their own enterprises, with a particular focus on young people who face barriers to education and skills development and to employment.

The Slingshot program comprised formal small business training, case management, business mentoring, network development, business review panel and access to a low-interest loan scheme. An initial 8-10 weeks' formal small business training culminated in a presentation to a business review panel. Other program components were provided simultaneously and the mentoring, network development, loan access and case management support was provided for up to 12 months

An initial focus on Slingshot participants gaining entry to the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS) as a program outcome was later broadened to incorporate a range of positive outcomes in employment (especially self-employment), education and training, and the development of individual pathway plans for all participants.

This paper

This paper, commissioned by the Slingshot Committee of Management, documents and reviews what has been learned from the program over its three years of operation as a demonstration project established to inform policy and practice in the area of youth employment programs. Specifically, the paper considers how Slingshot has achieved its objectives, documents the reasons for success and gauges the impact of Slingshot on the experiences and pathways of the young people involved.

The information, analysis and views presented in this paper are the result of consultations and interviews with key program stakeholders – the young people and program mentors, the program manager, the Slingshot Committee of Management members, and the trainers. The paper is also informed by examination of Slingshot program documentation and other relevant literature relating to self-employment and enterprise development programs.

Program impacts

The participants

Slingshot successfully targeted disadvantaged young people between the ages of 18 and 24 years old. Over all intakes, at program commencement:

- early school leavers made up just over half of all Slingshot participants, and half of this group had left school before completing year 11;
- the majority of participants (57%, 51 participants) were unemployed and not engaged in any paid work or study; and
- 67 of the 89 young people (75% of all participants) were either unemployed, underemployed or in insecure work.

Impacts on young people

Positive program impacts for the young people involved were identified in the following areas:

- Pathways, decision making and goal setting – young people felt that Slingshot training in business and goal setting skills helped them make informed decisions about self-employment pathways, and that guest speakers, trainers and staff helped motivate them to pursue their dreams.
- Engagement in education and employment – some young people chose to pursue further education and training in fields they were passionate about, some participants decided to work part-time to support themselves while they developed their business or business plan.
- Growing support networks – some participants appreciated and made use of Slingshot’s support network of ‘like-minded’ young people for support, inspiration and information, some participants used mentor business networks to develop their business ideas.
- NEIS entry – some young people used Slingshot as a stepping stone to NEIS, gaining entry on the basis of a well-developed business idea.
- Practical business and presentations skills – some young people felt that Slingshot training gave them the skills required to set up a business, some participants reported applying these skills to running their business and/or in daily life.
- Self-esteem and motivation – young people felt that Slingshot had a positive effect on their levels of confidence and/or motivation, crediting guest speakers’ motivational stories and mentors, trainers and staff’ personal interest and encouragement.

Education and employment outcomes

Many of the young people who completed Slingshot training continued to be engaged in self employment activities four months after completing the training and most had positive outcomes in regard to employment and education participation.

- On program completion 72% of all young people who completed the formal training component of Slingshot were engaged in self employment, full-time employment, in education or in a combination of these and were not in receipt of income support payments due to unemployment.
- Four months after completion of training 72% of all participants who completed the initial formal training component of Slingshot and for whom outcomes are known (38 of 53 with whom contact was made, 59% of all completers), were self employed or were in other full-time employment, in education or combining education and employment.

Case studies provide an insight into the mix of young people who have participated in Slingshot and of breadth of pathways embarked on.

Cost effectiveness

Given the high level of needs of the target group and the level of support and assistance provided by Slingshot program it appears to provide good value for money when compared with other available employment assistance for young people. The most telling comparison is with NEIS the only assistance specifically designed to assist people establish small

businesses. The cost effectiveness of Slingshot compares very favourably with NEIS given that entry to the latter program is highly competitive.

Slingshot influence

While Slingshot was highly successful in attracting substantial independent funding, early aims to seek influence through a widespread rollout of the program were not achieved. One Committee of Management member commented that the philanthropic sector had ‘done its bit’ in providing seeding while support from the corporate had not been forthcoming. Most of the advocacy and promotional activity of Slingshot was directed to the expansion of the program.

Key program success factors

The comprehensive and integrated design of Slingshot addresses a number of recognised barriers to young people’s self-employment. The program reduces a range of barriers faced by young people, including lack of business management skills, less life and work experience than older people, limited access to capital, and limited access to business networks. Strong youth services linkages were key to addressing the welfare issues of participants.

The case management component of the program is key to ensuring the best possible outcomes for young people are achieved. The case manager (the program manager) stayed in regular contact and provides encouragement and support. The young person’s progress and engagement with the program was tracked and the manager identified and addressed barriers and problems as they arose.

Young people indicated that they felt comfortable and empowered by Slingshot’s supportive and welcoming culture. Some saw mentors were invaluable to their successes, providing business and emotional support and expanding their business networks. Training the mentors and young people together strengthened mentoring relationships.

The flexible and ‘laid back’ style of training, its focus on the individual’s business idea, and the personal business experience of trainers, were all recognised as important to program successes.

Program issues and areas for development

Interviews and consultations indicated that program resources could have been increased. More staff and additional facilities for the young people may have improved program recruitment levels, retention and outcomes.

The role and accountability of Slingshot mentors needs to be clearly defined and understood by new mentors, particularly in light of the different support needs, skill levels and capacities of the young people.

A high level of resources and skills are required to build the necessary business networks, source funding and influence key parties. Consultations suggested these key roles for the committee of management members could have been developed further.

Stakeholder consultations highlighted some tension between ensuring disadvantaged young people were targeted to participate and achieving successful program outcomes. Other issues relating to matching training needs with participant abilities, facilitating better mixing at

networking evenings, and including work experience opportunities for participants were also considered.

Conclusions and recommendations

Slingshot has played an important role for the young people in the program. It clearly meets a need not addressed by other employment and training programs. This is especially the case for disadvantaged young people whose access to other supports is limited and who may have little experience of success in other education and work contexts. Slingshot acts as a pre-NEIS program for many young people who have been or would be likely to be unsuccessful gaining entry to NEIS.

Slingshot has achieved positive employment, education and training outcomes for participants and, given the high level of support and assistance provided and the relative disadvantage of the program target group, is a cost-effective program meeting an identified need for a small group of young people.

At the same time Slingshot performs a broader transition support role for young people, ensuring individual needs are met through an intensive and holistic approach. As such, for some young people interested in self-employment Slingshot provides a 'next step' from JPET. For other young people, especially those not in positive education, training or work situations, it provides skills, knowledge and networks to enable them to develop pathways to self-employment and/or other options.

The program environment that existed when Slingshot came into being in 2000 has changed little. If anything, with the demise of approval by Centrelink for unemployed people to undertake self employment activities (i.e. SEDS), there are now fewer options for young people interested in self-employment than there were in 2000.

The potential for the achievements of the Slingshot program as a workable pilot to influence policy and program change is still to be realised. With the discontinuation of Slingshot as an independent body it is important that Slingshot stakeholders ensure that the achievements and lessons from the program are used as a basis for seeking government support for self employment assistance for young people.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Slingshot partners pursue the reinstatement of self employment development activities as approved activities for Newstart and Youth Allowance recipients, with the Federal Government.

It is recommended that the Slingshot partners approach the Federal Government and advocate for the introduction of funding for community employment and youth agencies to provide self-employment development assistance to disadvantaged young people interested in small business, in partnership with registered training organisations.

Program development and improvement

A range of issues and areas for program improvement and development have been identified in this paper. The immediate continuation of the Slingshot by Melbourne Citymission at its new enterprise incubator has provided an opportunity for the program manager to deal with many of these issues.

A key factor behind Slingshot's success is the integration of various program components in a responsive and flexible way to address a range of personal support, guidance and small business development needs. The program successfully combined the critical elements of transition programs for disadvantaged young people with many of the key features of small business development support programs.

At the same time, a number of stakeholders identified some tension inherent in the program in relation to achieving successful self employment outcomes while targeting disadvantaged young people as participants. It is important that all young people interested in self employment are given the opportunity to access the program. A key characteristic of the Slingshot program is its flexibility in regard to entry with a strong emphasis on individual motivation and interest.

A very strong theme emerging from the individual young people's stories is the role the program played in assisting them to develop the self belief and confidence needed to set and pursue their own goals. While for some people these impacts do not translate into immediate employment and training outcomes, it is likely that the long-term benefits to individuals will be significant.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Slingshot providers review and address program issues and areas for development identified in this paper, with particular attention to ensuring adequate staffing and to the development of recruitment strategies.

It is recommended that Slingshot partners, in promoting and providing Slingshot and self-employment programs for young people in the future, continue to advocate for flexible entry to these programs.

It is recommended that program providers maintain a focus on the development of individual pathways plans as appropriate measures of program outcomes.

1. Introduction

Slingshot

The Slingshot program is a self-employment pathways program designed to assist young people who have an interest in running their own businesses to learn relevant skills and to explore the opportunities presented by self-employment. Slingshot's target group of young people aged 18 to 24 years old who might otherwise not have the opportunity to establish their own enterprises included a particular focus on young people facing barriers to education and skills development and to employment.

Slingshot comprised formal small business training, case management, business mentoring and network development. These components of the program were offered simultaneously, and the mentoring, network development and case management support were provided for up to 12 months following the initial 8-10 weeks' formal small business training.

An initial focus on Slingshot participants gaining entry to the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS) as a program outcome was broadened to incorporate a range of positive outcomes in employment (especially self-employment), education and training, and the development of individual pathway plans for all participants.

Established in June 2001, Slingshot was an initiative of the Growth Solutions group, a Melbourne-based business consultancy, and the Dusseldorp Skills Forum (DSF). A project advisory body including representatives of the project funders and partners became the Committee of Management when Slingshot was incorporated as an independent body. Initially run out of Melbourne Citymission Education, Employment and Training Support Unit and the Western Business Enterprise Centre in Footscray, in 2003 Slingshot moved to the Melbourne central business district to the headquarters of Melbourne Citymission where it was co-located with Frontyard Youth Services¹. During its three years of operation to mid 2004, 89 young people and over 50 mentors participated in the program.

This paper

This paper, commissioned by the Slingshot Committee of Management, documents and reviews what has been learned from the Slingshot program over its three years of operation as a demonstration project established to inform policy and practice in the area of youth employment programs. Specifically, the paper considers how Slingshot has achieved its objectives, documents the reasons for success and gauges the impact of Slingshot on the experiences and pathways of the young people involved. The paper also considers what could be done differently to increase successes in future programs, suggests appropriate benchmarks and measures of success, and makes recommendations for similar youth enterprise projects in the future.

The information, analysis and views presented in this paper are the result of consultations and interviews with key program stakeholders – the young people and mentors, the program manager, the Slingshot Committee of Management members, and the trainers. The paper is

¹ From July 2004 Slingshot as an independent body will cease to exist. Melbourne Citymission plans to provide the Slingshot self employment program through its new Fitzroy-based small business incubator.

also informed by examination of Slingshot program documentation and other literature, and other relevant literature relating to self-employment and enterprise development programs. Appendix One contains additional information about the methods used to develop this paper, including lists of the interviews and consultations undertaken.

Slingshot rationale: young people and self employment support

The Slingshot program was developed as a response to recognition of:

- the increasing importance of self-employment as a labour market option;
- the disadvantaged position of young people in the labour market;
- the particular difficulties young people face in pursuing an interest in self-employment; and
- the lack of support and assistance for young people wishing to pursue self-employment (DSF 2000).

In 1995, in a discussion of the need for more enterprise education in Australia for young people, Kenyon argued that to be successful in the ‘New Economy’ - an environment characterised by a growth in casual, contract, outsourcing and part-time work; more emphasis on life-long learning and up-skilling; and the increasing importance of self-employment and home based businesses as employment options – young people would need to develop ‘enterprising attitudes and actions’ (1995, p. 13).

At the time of the development of the Slingshot proposal in 2000, DSF identified several existing programs and organisations providing support to young people in their own business or planning to begin a business. A DSF document notes, however, that few of these programs provided comprehensive ongoing individual support, and also that the mainstream government program –NEIS was primarily geared to the needs of ‘more mature jobseekers and self-employment aspirants’ (DSF 2000, p. 9).

The under-representation of young people in self-employment is, at least in part, the result of barriers particular to young people. Young people tend to have less life and work experience and less well-developed networks of support. They also have fewer financial resources and less access to support from financial institutions. Promoting entrepreneurship and self-employment among young people can be viewed as an attempt to address their under-representation by assisting them overcome these obstacles thereby increasing their participation in self-employment, and, more generally, fostering enterprising skills and attitudes (White and Kenyon 2000). Writing in the UK context Chigunta regards the importance of promoting youth entrepreneurship as including:

- *‘creating employment opportunities for both the self-employed youth and other young people;*
- *bringing back the alienated and marginalized youth into the economic mainstream;*
- *helping address some of the socio-psychological problems and delinquency that arise from joblessness;*
- *promoting innovation and resilience in youth;*
- *promoting revitalization of the local community;*
- *young entrepreneurs may be particularly responsive to new economic opportunities and trends;*
- *youth run enterprises give young people, especially marginalised youth, a sense of meaning and belonging; and*

- *enterprise helps young women and men develop new skills and experiences that can be applied to many other challenges in life.* (Chigunta 2002, p. v)

A recent scoping paper on youth entrepreneurship groups existing Australian programs and initiatives into five areas: enterprise education, training and skills development (outside formal education), start-up assistance, business development assistance, and support networks (Department of Family and Community Services [FaCS] 2003, pp. 91-92).

Business development assistance, and programs and initiatives to support small business growth are few (FaCS 2003, p. 119). Of the business start-up programs that exist NEIS, established in the 1980s and administered by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), is the most comprehensive national program. NEIS includes an accredited training component covering business management skills such as marketing, planning and researching business opportunities, along with income and mentor support for 12 months.

The majority of financial start-up assistance for self-employment is provided on a competitive basis through prizes like the well-known Nescafe Big Break, and through some grant schemes. Other than a small number of programs targeted to indigenous young people there are no programs directed to young people in general. Support networks for young people in business are limited also, and, research shows young people perceive them to be not specific enough to meet their needs (FaCS 2003).

The demise of the Queen's Trust Youth Business Initiative in 1997 widened the gap in the area of youth self-employment programs. NEIS, the major government program in this area, has a low proportion of participants in the 18 to 24 year age group (9.6 per cent of participants between 1998 and 2000 [Kelly et al. 2001, p. 23]) and there is significant competition for NEIS places. In Victoria the largest NEIS provider reports interviewing approximately 1500 people for 300 places (personal communication). Older, more experienced applicants are more likely to have the skills and opportunity to have developed a feasible business idea, the basis for selection into NEIS.

2. The Slingshot program

Slingshot's objectives

Slingshot's objectives range from 'big picture' objectives to specific objectives concerning individual participant outcomes. At the broad level the Slingshot program was established with the aim of 'ensur(ing) that self-employment emerges as a viable future option for all those young people with the desire and skills to be successful through this form of endeavour' (DSF 2000, p. 4). It was established to fill a gap in services for young people and to demonstrate the potential for such services to achieve positive employment, education and training outcomes for young people.

Specific program objectives for participants are the development of a self-employment pathways plan and a positive post-participation destination in employment (especially self-employment), training or education. Objectives have also been expressed as to successfully facilitate the first step along a self-employment pathway. Further to this Slingshot aims to provide participants with the skills and outlook to take advantage of changed labour markets in which employment is characterised by much greater uncertainty than in the past. Thus it aims to empower young people through developing and improving their self esteem and confidence, and through providing them with the skills and support to enable them to become motivated actors in the labour market.

A further program goal has been to enable young people to succeed in self-employment in order to create role models. Good role models may help promote enterprise as a viable option for young people and also can be used to motivate young people interested in enterprise.

Outcome measures recognise that self-employment is not the only positive outcome that can result from Slingshot. While entry to NEIS is one measure of a successful outcome, engagement with education, training and employment, and taking smaller steps towards self-employment by developing one's work skills as an employee are also understood as positive outcomes.

Target group

The Slingshot program targeted disadvantaged young people aged 18 to 24 years who have a strong ambition to be self-employed and who lack support mechanisms; face financial, geographic and/or emotional difficulties; and lack connections to education, skill development and other employment opportunities.

Some of the things taken account of when considering a young person's entry to the Slingshot program were:

- inability to apply or previous unsuccessful application to NEIS;
- income support payment recipients;
- early school leaving or disengagement from education and training;
- unemployment or engagement in part-time or casual work with poor pathways;
- referral from a welfare or employment program (e.g. JPET for 'at risk' young people); and
- living in an unsupported environment.

Program design

The Slingshot program was designed to address the barriers facing all young people attempting to start a business including ‘limited life and work experiences, limited financial resources, limited business and network contacts, limited exposure to relevant role models and age discrimination’ (FaCS 2003, p. 61). In addition, with its focus on disadvantaged young people, Slingshot aimed to support those facing additional barriers such as lack of relevant skills, poor support networks and other issues (e.g. housing problems, debt).

It was designed to be a comprehensive system of support that provided assistance at each phase of the business development process. The six key components of the program are:

- case management support;
- accredited training in small business;
- business mentoring;
- development of a young persons’ network;
- review of concepts and plans by a business review panel; and
- access to a low-interest loan.

Program components

| Component | Description |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Case management support | Individual needs assessment, followed by ongoing personal support (provided by the program manager). |
| Accredited training in small business | Training in modules of the Certificate IV in Small Business Management (provided by the Western Business Enterprise Centre of Victoria University). |
| Business mentoring | A dedicated Slingshot-trained mentor. Mentors are recruited from a diverse range of industry backgrounds and are matched to participants to support and advise them on their business idea. |
| Young persons’ network | Formal and informal networking forums and opportunities for past and current participants |
| Business review panel | Assessment of business idea by a review panel of business people. |
| Low interest loan | Access to a low interest loan facility through the Fitzroy Carlton Credit Co-operative in partnership with the Brotherhood of St Laurence (loans of up to \$5,000 for young people with a business plan). |

(Source: Slingshot Support Opportunities September 2003)

How the Slingshot program works

Slingshot participants undertake accredited training in three modules from the [Certificate IV in Business \(Small Business Management\)](#). The training centres on the young person’s business idea, and uses a business plan template to apply the lessons. When training is completed, the young person presents their business idea to a business review panel and receives feedback.

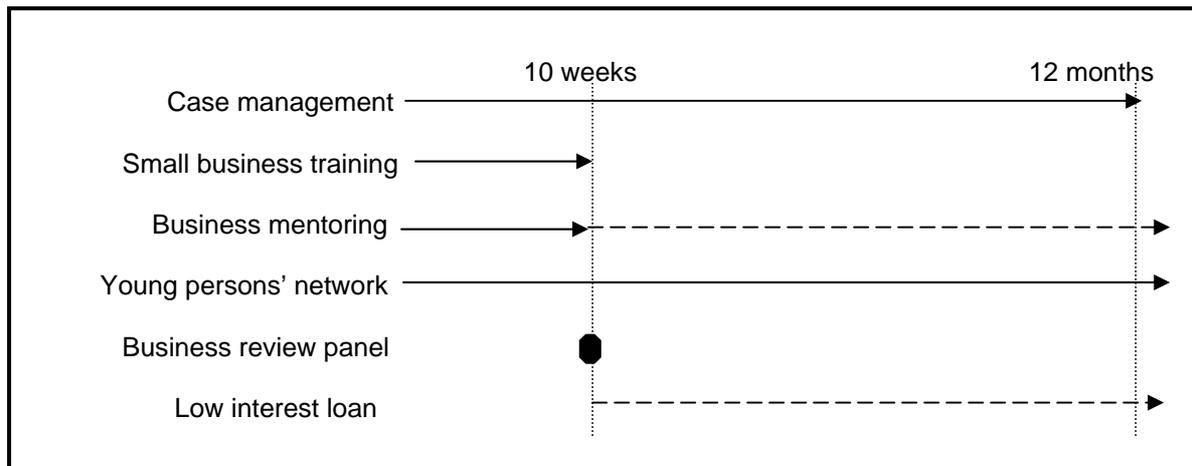
Each young participant is matched with a mentor once the mentoring trading has commenced. Young people and mentors meet at the training nights and arrange times to meet outside these sessions. Weekly mentor training nights are held in parallel with the small business training. These two-hour sessions, facilitated by a mentor trainer run for six sessions. Two of these sessions are for mentors only - the first session where they are introduced to the program and the challenges they may face and a later session to debrief on how mentoring relationships are progressing. On the other nights mentors and the young

people attend together and the focus is on building the mentoring relationships and personal development.

The program manager keeps close track of how each young person is progressing through the training and with his or her mentor. She links each young person with services she believes will help them reach their optimum learning capacity. An open door policy enables the young people to visit the manager any time during office hours.

Networking evenings are held three to four times a year. These evenings provide an opportunity for all past participants and mentors to come together to share food, listen to guest speakers, and to network.

Program timing



Management, governance, partnerships and funding

As an incorporated entity Slingshot was governed by a committee of management made up of representatives of the project partner organisations and a small number of business people. Seed funding for the project over the three years of its operation as a demonstration project was provided by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum, the philanthropic Myer Foundation, the Big Brother Movement, and the Melbourne Citymission which also provided in-kind support including housing the project. Project support was also provided by project partner Growth Solutions Group, a Melbourne-based business start up consultancy.

Slingshot drew on a wide network of community and institutional resources to provide its combination of individual support and training. From 2002 a full-time program manager was supported by a part-time administrative assistant. The program manager set up and implemented the program. She formed relationships with relevant service providers and education institutions, recruited young people and mentors, acted as the case manager for participants, and promoted and administered the program.

Central to the program were relationships with Victoria University who provided the accredited training program; with Donna White Consulting who trained the mentors and facilitated mentor nights; and with the Fitzroy Carlton Credit Co-operative and Brotherhood of St Laurence who together offered the low interest loan scheme. Relationships with NEIS, employment services providers and others were also important.

The program in detail

Recruitment and case management

Slingshot had two intakes of participants per year, recruiting young people and mentors through advertising, word of mouth and agency networks. using in-depth interviews the program manager aimed to develop a picture of the young person's personal circumstances, of their business idea and also of their interest in pursuing self-employment. The program manager and assistant built relationships with the young people and remain in touch with them throughout the program – visiting them during the accredited training; being present at mentor training nights; and inviting them to networking nights.

The individual case management approach enabled active problem solving with the case manager's role including:

- recognising and addressing barriers to training and participation in other program events;
- supporting and facilitating relationships between mentors and young people, and liaising when problems arise;
- linking young people with relevant health, housing and legal services;
- encouraging and helping young people to pursue their passions, especially in the area of self-employment;
- assisting with pathway planning and decision-making ; and
- maintaining an awareness of the young person's progress through the program.

Accredited small business training

The aim of the training was to lessen skill barriers and promote informed pathway planning through supporting the young people to make informed decisions about self-employment, and providing them with the skills to move ahead with their business plans. The purpose of the eight to ten week accredited training was to give the young people basic skills in small business management. The training aimed to provide participants with an understanding of the commitment and skills needed to succeed in self-employment; to assist them to develop their business idea into a feasible business plan (which may be used to apply for NEIS); and to engage them in education.

Victoria University of TAFE (VUT) Western Business Enterprise Centre in Footscray provided the training. The program grounded the learnings from the training modules through the practical application of the young person's business idea using a business plan template. Teaching materials were developed by the trainers especially for the Slingshot participants, and the young people were taught in a group on campus Or at Melbourne Citymissions EETSU offices

The vocational training consists of three modules from Certificate IV Business,(Research Business Opportunities; Promote Business; and Manage Finances. The Certificate III in Small Business Management modules were chosen by the VU training coordinator as the most appropriate accredited training for the Slingshot participants on the basis of a needs assessment of the first group. When Certificate III in Small Business Management ceased to be accredited the training changed to Certificate IV level.

Mentoring

Inadequate business networks have been identified as a barrier to self-employment for young people and the development of mentor contacts is designed to reduce this barrier. The

mentoring component of Slingshot engaged the young person in a relationship that provided practical business support tailored to the individual from the point of developing the business idea to implementing a business plan. The mentor assisted the young person to develop a pathway plan, listening to their ideas and providing advice. The mentor also supported the young person through acting as an advocate, providing encouragement and through having a genuine interest in seeing them succeed. In addition the mentor relationship was designed to expand the young person's business networks, as were the mentor training evenings. At the evening functions young people had the opportunity to talk to all the other mentors involved with the current group of young participants.

Slingshot mentors were recruited through personal and industry networks, coaching schools and approaches to corporations. Potential mentors underwent a police check and initial interviews with the program manager. The program manager's main criteria for selection were that the person was interested in engaging in one-to-one contact with a young person, wants to share skills and experience with young people, and wants to 'give back to the community'. People who have been in business themselves were regarded highly, though this was not a selection requirement as the range of young people in the program had different support needs – some were at a stage where they need more personal support and encouragement than a focus on specific business advice.

Slingshot mentors underwent training and an induction to the program. Mentor training nights, run parallel to the small business training, were largely devoted to relationship building and personal development. This facilitated forum supported mentors and young people to build a trusting relationship that could continue after training was completed.

Young person's network

The young person's network component was designed to provide peer support networks for young people involved in or interested in self-employment. These networks were seen to provide emotional and practical support to the young people. Young people were able to connect with others who understand the stresses of self-employment, to get advice and motivation from their contemporaries and to extend their business networks.

Slingshot networking events were held three to four times a year. They aimed to bring together past young participants and mentors to expand their networks. Events were normally held in an informal venue, such as a pub, with music, food and entertainment provided by past participants. These evenings also gave some young people the opportunity to reconnect with the idea of self-employment, and provided them with some inspiration and impetus.

Anon –line forum was developed in 2003 and whilst traffic is slow it is a networking resource that could be further developed.

Business review panel

The aim of the business review panel was to assist the young person to further develop and refine the business plan. The panel provided constructive criticism and feedback on the presentation of each young person's business idea and plan. Along with supporting increased confidence and developing presentation skills this was seen to help prepare the young person for the NEIS application process.

Each panel was held over two days after the young people had completed their accredited training. Young people who wanted to participate were given half an hour to present their

business plan to the panel. The presentations were also designed to give the young people in the program a sense of completion and achievement.

Loans scheme

The low-interest loan component of Slingshot was established to reduce the financial barriers faced by young people interested in self-employment, particularly the difficulties of accessing funds through mainstream banks. The loan was designed to give young people the opportunity to fund their business start-up and expansion and to build a credit rating to improve future access to other financial institutions. Slingshot participants with a developed business plan were able to apply for a loan of up to \$5000. Approval of applications was by the Slingshot Committee of Management, the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Fitzroy Carlton Credit Co-operative. Slingshot and the Brotherhood of St Laurence guaranteed the loans. Access to loans of up to \$400 was relatively easy with the only requirement that the money be used to 'progress their business'. For loans of between \$400 and \$5000 young people were required to complete a detailed submission to the Slingshot Committee of Management and to pass the Credit Co-operative's loan requirements. Slingshot participants were also provided with funding of up to \$100 for a business purpose.

Slingshot participants

Of the 89 young people - 51 male and 38 female – who participated in Slingshot, three quarters were in the 20 to 25 year age group on commencement in the program and the remaining quarter (22) were aged from 17 to 19 years.

As would be expected the majority of the participants came from the Western suburbs with the program initially located in the west and then in the Melbourne central business district.

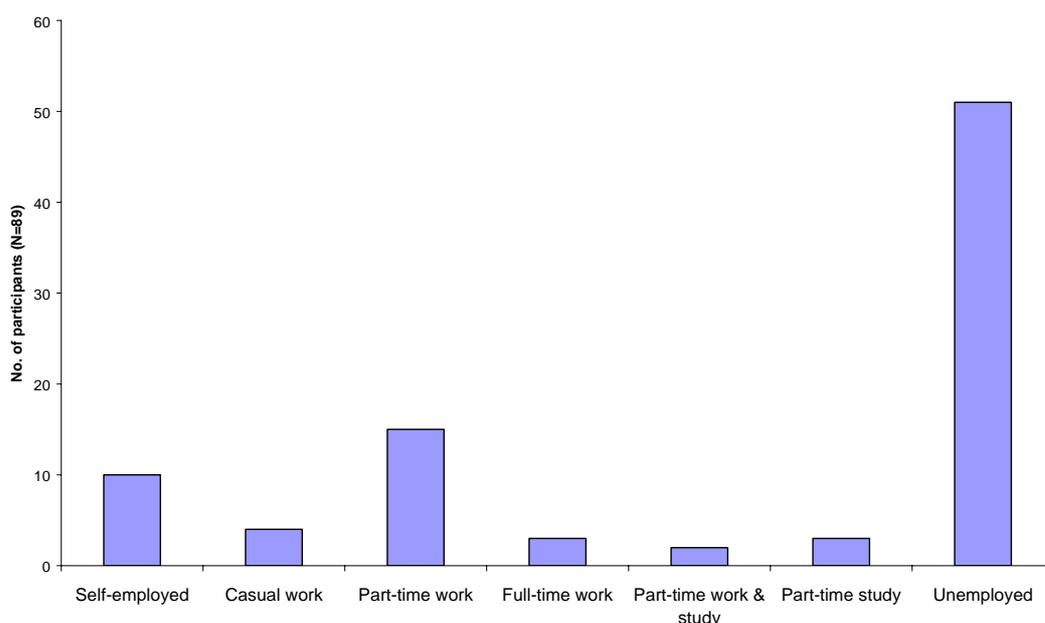
The program successfully targeted disadvantaged young people with early school leavers making up just over half of all Slingshot participants, and with half of this group having left school before completing Year 11. Only 42 per cent of the Slingshot participants had completed any formal education or training since leaving school, and they were:

- 10 young people who had completed a pre-apprenticeship or other short course;
- 14 who had completed a Certificate (I-IV level) course;
- 8 who had completed diploma level course; and
- 5 who had completed degrees.

The majority of participants (57%, 51 participants) were unemployed and not engaged in any paid work or study when they entered the Slingshot program. In addition to this group, another 16 young people (18%) were receiving Centrelink income support payments due to unemployment. (Sorry I don't get this?) Some of these young people had some part-time or casual work, others were involved in self-employment activities and some were undertaking part-time study. So, in total, 67 of the 89 young people (75% of all participants) were unemployed, underemployed or in insecure work when they commenced Slingshot.

The chart below provides detail of the education and work circumstances of the Slingshot participants when they entered the program.

Chart 1: Participant employment & education status on entering Slingshot



3. Impacts of Slingshot

Perhaps the outcomes are all a bit different - from developing confidence to start a business to being given a lifeline - but I know they are grateful to have the experience for different reasons. (Slingshot mentor)

Some Slingshot stories

Liza

Liza was 22 and unemployed when she heard about Slingshot from her Job Network provider. She had been thinking about starting her own screen-printing business for some time and had unsuccessfully applied for NEIS. She believed this was because she didn't have her business idea fully formed, nor did she have the necessary experience.

Liza said she has always had 'a good attitude' about her future and 'a good work ethic' but thought people weren't interested in helping young people start businesses. She didn't think anyone would take her ideas seriously.

Liza learned more about her strengths and weaknesses and how to apply what she'd learned to self-employment from the personal development sessions. She developed a good network of people and understands the importance of keeping in touch with them. Much of her business now is through her network. She also made some really good friends from Slingshot.

In particular Liza found the one-to-one mentoring really useful although she would have liked a mentor who was in the same industry for more specific guidance.

Liza says 'the Slingshot staff would do anything to see you succeed.'

She has successfully completed NEIS and her screen printing and design business is developing. She has a part-time job to ensure she has a steady income but hopes in the future that she will be able to work full-time in her business.

Rowena

Rowena had worked in many cafés and had gained some business experience from her current work running a small gourmet food venture. She felt that opening a café would be a natural next-step for her. A friend suggested the Slingshot program.

Rowena was motivated but felt she didn't have the confidence to start a business. From Slingshot she learned about the steps that need to be taken to set up a business and the importance of fully developing and researching business ideas to be able to make informed decisions. This gave her the confidence to consider her options more seriously.

Rowena did not complete Slingshot training, finding it difficult to attend as she was getting a lot of work as a freelance cook. However, she says Slingshot played a part in her decision to pursue her real passion: 'the personal development sessions were a catalyst for me to follow my passion in the performing arts'. From Slingshot, Rowena remembers being regularly prompted to state her life goals. She likes now to remind herself how important it is to have goals and to reassess them from time to time.

Rowena decided not to open a café. She is now studying classical music and voice and she continues to work part time as a cook. Rowena believes the business skills gained from Slingshot have helped her in her freelance work as a cook and will continue to support her in her planned performance career. She sees management and marketing skills as keys to becoming a well-known and successful performer.

Travis

Travis was unemployed when he saw a poster advertising Slingshot at his Job Network provider's office. For a few years, had been thinking about starting an internet service in country Victoria.

Slingshot has given Travis the confidence to pursue his dreams for a web design business and helped him focus and refine his business idea. He now has a part-time job and, in his spare time, he continues to work on getting his business started. Travis says he took on part-time work because of encouragement from Slingshot so he could earn an income while establishing his business.

Travis said that he really had no career goals before he started Slingshot, and now he has a few. 'So Slingshot must have helped me. I now want to do well in my current job and want to see my business in web design take off in the next year.'

Completing Slingshot was a confidence booster for Travis who says he has a history of starting things and never finishing them. Ongoing contact with Slingshot staff and their interest in him have been a major factor helping him to 'stay on track'.

Travis hopes his web design business will take off in the near future, although he knows this is a very competitive area in which he may find it hard for his business to survive .

Jason

Jason, was interested in starting a computer business with a friend when he came to Slingshot. He says Slingshot staff helped him realise his passion for sound engineering and pointed him to a relevant course. During Slingshot training, Jason decided that his friend would not make a good business partner as he did not do his share of the work. Since leaving Slingshot over a year ago, Jason has been caring for

his ill mother. He recently applied for the TAFE course in sound engineering. He is also 'trying to get off the [carer] pension and into the workforce'. For Jason one of the positive aspects of Slingshot was just getting out of the house and doing something.

Duong

'Everyone thinks my business plan is good, so hopefully one day soon I'll have enough money for it.'

Duong was working as a waiter when he saw a poster advertising Slingshot. He had been thinking about setting up a not-for-profit computer centre for the people in the high-rise public housing estate where he lives to provide cheap access to computers and the internet. He said 'many of my friends have no where to go to surf the internet, especially to look for jobs, and they have nowhere to write an application for a job'. Duong investigated a two-year business course but he did not want to wait that long.

At first Duong wasn't sure if he could trust his Slingshot mentor but now says,

I am glad my mentor was persistent and was patient with me. My mentor has really helped me develop my business idea and gives me good advice and encouragement. We still see each other every week, which is important because I get frustrated about still not having my business started. I have some family problems as well so he makes sure me and my family are okay.

With the help of his mentor and Slingshot staff he has put his business plan proposal to a few agencies and his local government authority.

Tania

Now that I know that I can do it, I'll never give up, I'll do whatever it takes.

Tania had been working for a jeweller, learning about jewellery making and design. She was skilled at jewellery design and when she became unemployed she decided she would like to start her own design business. Tania considered NEIS but realised she would not be eligible because her business idea was not well developed and she had no prior experience running a business. Her sister, a school careers advisor, suggested Tania do Slingshot to prepare her for NEIS.

Slingshot provided Tania with an understanding of the processes she needed to go through to set up a business and a framework for exploring and talking about her business ideas. These things, and the encouragement of her mentor and program staff gave Tania the confidence she lacked before Slingshot.

Tania is currently in the NEIS program and is designing and making jewellery and selling it to stores around Melbourne. Slingshot gave her the confidence to take her passion and skills further than she thought she could:

Anoushka

Anoushka was working full-time in a customer service role when she saw a poster advertising Slingshot. In her spare time she had been making and selling jewellery. She was interested in developing this into a business but had no idea what this would involve. She had thought about doing NEIS, but knew that, as she was not unemployed, she was not eligible.

Anoushka believes she had the ability and entrepreneurial qualities necessary to start a business. However, she is sure she

would not have done so if she had not participated in the Slingshot program. What Slingshot gave her was 'the push I needed to get things moving'.

Encouragement from Slingshot also convinced her to gain a formal qualification and she is now studying fashion design full-time while running her business selling young fashion designers' products with two other designers. In this role Anoushka acts as a mentor for young designers.

Anoushka believes that self-employment will probably be a bit of a struggle sometimes, especially financially, but she thinks it will be worth it. She strongly values the creative control she would not be able to have working for someone else.

Sam

Sam was unemployed when she saw a poster for Slingshot at the Melbourne Citymission office. She thought it might be a good way of pursuing a clothing design idea she had been thinking about for a while. While Sam said she did not really have any interest in running a business, she thought that if she wanted to be a designer she may have to consider starting her own business in the future.

Sam enjoyed doing Slingshot and made some new friends. She enjoyed the 'new learning experience' and the opportunity to explore her ideas and understand what would be required if she decided to proceed.

After completing Slingshot training Sam decided not to go ahead with her business idea. She said Slingshot helped her decide that starting a business was not for her at this stage. Sam is currently not working and is thinking about what she would like to do next.

Program impacts on participants

Interviews conducted with the trainers, the program manager, mentors and young people provide a wealth of information about the ways in which Slingshot has impacted on the young people involved. Program impacts identified in interviews and consultations were in the following areas, each of which is discussed in detail below.

- Pathways, decision making and goal setting
- Engagement in education and employment
- Growing support networks
- NEIS entry
- Practical business and presentations skills
- Self-esteem and motivation

As a result of Slingshot participation many young people continue to pursue their business ideas in a range of industries and occupational areas including jewellery design and production; fashion design, manufacture and retailing; graphic design and screen printing; film production; animation; catering and food processing; web design; and computer maintenance.

Pathways, decision making and goal setting

Slingshot helps young people to make decisions about their futures and information and encouragement were seen by the young people as the keys to assisting them make decisions.

Slingshot's accredited training and business plan development gave participants a good understanding of what was involved in running a business and helped them make informed decisions about what to do next. It helped them to make realistic assessments of their business ideas. While a few participants decided that self-employment would take more effort than they wanted to put in, others took what they had learned and applied it. Some successfully applied to NEIS, using the business idea that Slingshot had helped them develop. A few used the skills to more efficiently run and grow their existing businesses. Some young people continue to develop their business plans, while working part-time to support themselves.

Slingshot taught some participants the importance of fully exploring business and pathway ideas; the importance of researching and considering outcomes and of not rushing into anything. For example, Marnie, who already had a film production business, came to Slingshot because she wanted to make it more 'efficient', and because she wanted to become more educated about running a business. Discussions with her mentor helped her see new business opportunities and Marnie decided the business direction had to change. She acted, launching a new arm of her business. Comments from other young people include:

It opened up my eyes to the things I had to consider to run my own business and I [now] know what is achievable.

Slingshot opened my eyes to what it takes to run a business. There's marketing, budgeting and logistics, things that I didn't really understand.

[Slingshot] made me look at things a bit more [before going ahead].

Guest speakers were regarded by the young people as interesting and motivating:

It was good to hear the positive and negative sides of running a business. It made me understand how difficult running a business can be and I really have to prepare for what happens if my business fails.

The development of goals and of goal-setting skills were identified as impacts of the program by some young people who said their mentors had worked with them to think about short and long-term goals.

Slingshot... provided us with tools for goal setting. I'll have to start setting myself some goals.

Slingshot gave me tools to set short-term goals. So far I've [achieved] them all!

Some young people suggested that their desire to 'be their own boss' was a key motivating factor for their interest in self-employment. One young person suggested self-employment was 'perfect' for her, as she felt she needed to be independent in the way she ran her life. Many of the young people we spoke to said Slingshot guest speakers, trainers and staff encouraged them to follow their passions. This had a significant impact on the decisions and pathways of some of the young people we spoke to.

Staff and trainers believe that Slingshot supports young people to make decisions about what they want to do and helps them design appropriate pathways. One trainer speaks of the Slingshot program as 'opening a window' for the young people involved and working to increase young people's 'understanding of self and their opportunities'. This allows them to make more informed decisions about their futures, build realistic pathways and set goals. 'What you hope is they take one step!'

The project manager and the trainers say it is important to realise that self-employment is a long-term goal, and not something all young people can achieve in the short term. Young people come to Slingshot with more or less developed business concepts, the program helps them come to grips with how realistic the business idea is and to plan for how they might go about realising their idea. They may proceed with their idea immediately, they may get a job in a related field, or study in the area, or 'they may decide to wait a few years'.

Engagement with education and employment

Some of the young people are undertaking or have applied for university or TAFE courses on completion of Slingshot. Several are pursuing further education and training in fields they are passionate about. Anoushka said that her attitudes to gaining qualifications and a formal education changed as a direct result of talking to guest speakers and mentors.

Slingshot has hired program graduates to make promotional materials, videos and to work on the Slingshot website. Slingshot was Marnie's first client for her film production business and she reports that this employment helped to keep her motivated. Other young people were encouraged to work part-time so they had some income while they were working to set up their businesses or refine their business plans.

The program manager and trainers commented that positive experiences with education while participating in Slingshot encouraged young people to re-engage with education, employment and the community. The training co-ordinator said young people 'seem to

refocus' as a result of Slingshot and to re-engage with adult education options. He believed that 'being involved with a tertiary institution' facilitated this. Slingshot training links young people with Victoria University with their enrolment in Slingshot's accredited training modules giving them access to the university's facilities and the opportunity to see what is on offer.

Growing support networks

Many young people said that they enjoyed meeting the other Slingshot participants and discussing business ideas. Many were still in touch with others they had met through the program and, for most, the contacts and networks they had developed were important. When asked about what help his Slingshot network gave him, Duong said 'having friends to talk to – who did Slingshot as well – about my problems starting a business, is encouraging'. Some young people commented that they had made good friends.

Many young people stressed the benefits of developing connections with people - particularly mentors - who assisted them in developing their business or business idea. Some spoke of the importance of maintaining and extending the networks they developed through Slingshot and some young people have stayed in contact with their mentors for up to two years. Some of those not now pursuing self-employment note that people they met through Slingshot may be of help to them in the future. For example, Jason said that if he needed business advice in the future he had 'met a lot of people, got a lot of business cards, and could call them and they would probably help me'. Young people are encouraged to talk to all the mentors involved with the current group of Slingshot participants and the contacts young people make with different mentors expand their business networks and allow them access to a broader range of skills and specialised advice.

Staff and trainers commented that participating in Slingshot gave young people practice and skills in communicating with a wide range of people. They believe that Slingshot provides an environment in which trusting relationships can develop between participants and between young people and mentors. Trainers spoke of personal development benefits. For example, there is 'a coming together of people who are strangers (and) there's a lot of opening up... of learning to accept critical support'. One young person commented that he had developed better 'people skills' during Slingshot's many group work sessions.

NEIS entry

Participation in Slingshot had provided a stepping stone to NEIS for young people, including some who were initially referred by NEIS providers to Slingshot. Liza, whose earlier attempt to get into NEIS had been unsuccessful, said that, without Slingshot, she did not think she would have been able to gain entry. She thought Slingshot was a good 'pre NEIS' opportunity and was able to use it to develop her business idea and gain entry into NEIS.

Now that I know I can do it [start my own business] I'll never give up – I'll do whatever it takes.

Staff and trainers see entry to NEIS as a positive outcome for those young people who are committed to starting their own business as it provides income support while participants develop their businesses and provides further training in business management.

Practical business and presentation skills

Young people report that Slingshot training has equipped them with a good understanding of the skills needed to set up and run a business. Many young people said that they had been able to apply the skills and knowledge gained during training. Some were running and planning businesses and others were working on their business plans. A few young people said Slingshot gave them practical tools to better explore business decisions. Some report they now have the skills and knowledge they need to set up a business in the future. One young person commented that the bookkeeping skills he had learned would make him more employable.

A few young people noted that Slingshot had helped them to develop their presentation skills, something they had found useful, for example, when ‘pitching business ideas to possible investors’.

Self-esteem and motivation

Young people reported that Slingshot had a positive effect on their levels of confidence and/or motivation. Some young people, including those who went on to NEIS or to run a business, came to Slingshot already highly motivated. They were among those who commented on the motivating influence of the guest speakers and mentors. Several young people commented that Slingshot helped them believe in themselves and, more specifically, in their ability to be successful in self-employment. For example, Naomi said:

Doing Slingshot made me realise that my idea to design and make jewellery was not a silly dream. My parents kept telling me that there was no way a young person like me with absolutely no experience making anything would be able to have a business making jewellery.

Naomi recently started her business, with support from NEIS, and was very optimistic about her future. Another young woman said she has ‘aimed a lot higher’ since completing Slingshot. Tania said she has now taken her ‘passion’ further than she previously thought she could.

A few young people commented that Slingshot made them realise there were many people around who were helpful and supportive of young people, particularly if a young person put in a bit of effort and asked for help. Mentors were seen by many as the key to sustaining their motivation to pursue self-employment. Young people also spoke highly of the guest speakers; finding them motivational and inspiring. Jason said:

They got speakers who had run their own businesses [and] that helped inspire us. It was good to know someone who’s gone through and done it [as] they know what they’re talking about. They might have done business in another area, though [it was] still helpful.

Some of the mentors we spoke to commented on the impact on the young people of having a listener and a motivator.

[Karen] often only contacts me when things aren’t going well so I listen to her and motivate her to keep going. I think I understand when she just needs a sounding board and not really much more. I know when she doesn’t need my advice as well.

[Alice] got a lot of encouragement from me. She was determined to give it a go so I kept reassuring her that she could do it. At the time, I think it was good for her to hear that from me, as I think she respected my opinions.

Staff and trainers believe that the mentoring relationship can have a lasting positive impact on the young person. In the mentor the young person has someone who is interested in them and in their success. Ideally, the mentor is someone who believes in the young person and wants to help them reach their potential. Staff and trainers suggest that even a short-lived relationship with someone who is genuinely interested in the young person's success can boost self-esteem and confidence. As one mentor said:

I reckon some of these kids finished Slingshot feeling really empowered. ... These people have been part of a group and program that has really encouraged and supported them, and taken immense interest in them. So, even if they don't start a business they've had a good life experience, connected with people and probably feel good about themselves.

Employment, education and training outcomes

Employment, training and education participation of the young people on completion of the Slingshot program is a key measure of the program's success. The program manager recorded the self-employment and other employment, education and training participation of Slingshot participants for several months after completion of the program.

At the time of writing this paper 13 participants in the seventh intake of the program were still undertaking Slingshot training. Twelve of the 76 participants from earlier intakes had withdrawn before completing the training, leaving 64 participants who had completed Slingshot training.

Initial outcomes

One month after completion of the training component (at the end of the first quarter after commencement):

- there was no information for two young people;
- seven (10% of all who completed training and 9% of all who commenced) were not engaged in any work or study;
- 30 of the young people (39% of all participants in the six intakes and 47% of all completers) were engaged in self-employment activities, many combining these with other work and study;
- 9 participants (12% of the all participants in the first six intakes and 14% of all who completed training) were in full-time work or were combining part-time work with study; and
- 18 of the young people (24% of all participants and 28% of all who completed training) were receiving income support payments due to unemployment.

Nine of the 30 young people engaged in self-employment activities (14% of all who completed training) had entered the NEIS program or Self Employment Development Scheme (SEDS)².

So, in total, 72% of all young people who completed the formal training component of Slingshot were engaged in self employment, full-time employment, in education or in a combination of these and not in receipt of income support payments due to unemployment.

Four months after training completion

Chart 2 provides a comparison of education and training participation on commencement of Slingshot, at the end of the first quarter (approximately one month after completion of formal training) and at the end of the second quarter (approximately six months after commencement of the program and *four months after completion* of formal training) for the 64 young people who completed the program.

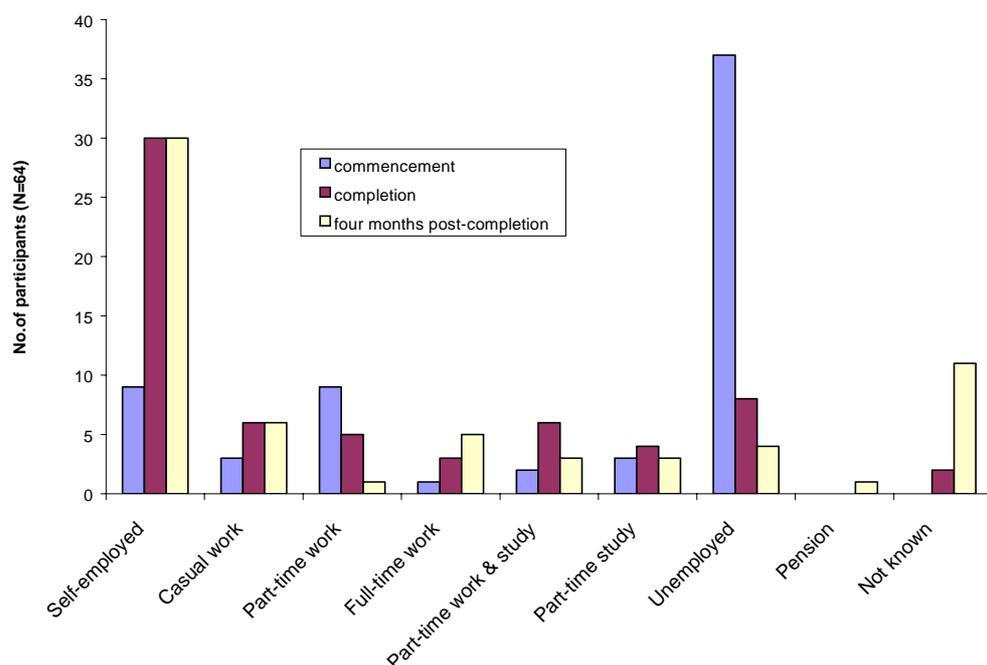
Positive employment and education outcomes are maintained *four months after completion*. As shown in Chart 2 at the end of the second quarter (four months after completion of Slingshot training):

- 30 participants (47% of the 64 who completed training and 57% of the 53 completers with whom contact was made) continued to be engaged in self-employment activities;
- another 8 (12.5% of completers) were in full-time work or combining paid work and study and a further 4 were in part-time work only;
- a small number (4 participants) were unemployed and not undertaking any study or work; and
- there was no information for 11 of the young people who had completed the training.

So, in total, four months after completion of the initial training 72% of all participants who completed the initial formal training component of Slingshot and for whom outcomes are known (38 of 53 with whom contact was made, 59% of all completers), were self employed or were in full-time employment, in education or combining education and employment.

² Self employment development activities were regarded by Centrelink as ‘approved activities’ for some unemployed people who have been on Newstart or Youth Allowance for six months. Approvals to this scheme have now been suspended.

Chart 2: Employment and education status of participants at commencement, 1st quarter and 2nd quarter*.



* first quarter (approximately one month after completion of formal small business training) and at the end of the second quarter (approximately six months after commencement of the program and four months after completion of formal training component)

Longer-term outcomes

Participants were tracked for another six months during which time they were contacted twice – approximately seven months and again ten months after completing their training. At seven months, while contact was made with just over half (37) the participants, positive outcomes were reported by 29 of these young people (45% of the original 64 completing training and 78% of those with whom contact was made), 17 of who were self-employed. At ten months, contact was made with 28 participants and 21 of these reported positive employment and education participation, 14 of them in self-employment.

It was not possible to use the quantitative data to establish if particular groups of participants were more likely to benefit from participation in the Slingshot program than others. This is because of the relatively small numbers of program participants, their diversity of backgrounds and characteristics and the large numbers for whom no information was available after the second quarter follow up.

Other program impacts

Network of mentors

Mentor training has also allowed mentors to develop their own networks of support. Mentors speak of the key benefits of sharing their mentoring experiences, discussing common problems, and providing emotional support and practical advice to each other. The networks have helped sustain mentors’ involvement with Slingshot.

Service linkages and improved networks

In their role as service brokers Slingshot project staff connected young people with relevant services in many areas including housing, health, education, legal aid and income assistance. Slingshot established relationships with a range of youth service providers, with education and training providers, with Centrelink, with Job Network and with NEIS providers, and used these to facilitate appropriate referrals of young people in both directions.

Role models

Past Slingshot participants who have been successful in starting up a business served as role models for participants. As guest speakers they told others about how they began, about their successes and failures. These young people also acted as role models for other young people interested in self-employment. Their stories were written up in newspapers and magazines, and talked about on the radio and at relevant events.

Centrelink

Slingshot staff worked to develop strong connections with Centrelink. The program manager negotiated to get Centrelink to recognise up to 10 weeks of Slingshot participation as an 'approved activity', fulfilling the requirements of mutual obligation. This freed participants to devote their full attention to the Slingshot program for this period. Slingshot is one of the few Centrelink 'approved activities', other than NEIS, promoting the exploration and realisation of self-employment goals.

Slingshot as a demonstration program

Slingshot was conceived as a demonstration project aiming to influence policy and program changes. A substantial amount of documentation of the pilot and its successes has been undertaken over the three years. Most of this was developed for presentations to potential funders of the demonstration project. While Slingshot was highly successful in attracting substantial independent funding, early aims to seek influence through a widespread rollout of the program were not achieved. One Committee of Management member commented that the philanthropic sector had 'done its bit' in providing seeding while support from the corporate had not been forthcoming.

4. Cost effectiveness of Slingshot

Program costs

Over its three years of operation the costs of the Slingshot program have varied. Based on her experience over this period the program manager has developed indicative costings for running the program for 12 months. On the basis of these costings it is estimated that the per participant cost of the Slingshot program is approximately \$4,240. This is based on 1.5 full-time staff, two program intakes each of 15 young people in a 12 month period and participant eligibility for the concession rate of TAFE fees.

The table on the next page provides a very rough comparison of Slingshot costs and cost effectiveness and a number of other types of employment assistance some young people may be able to access. Income support payments are not included.

Given the high level of needs of the target group and the level of support and assistance provided by Slingshot program the comparison suggests it provides good value for money. The most telling comparison is with NEIS the only assistance specifically designed to assist people establish small businesses. The cost effectiveness of Slingshot compares very favourably with NEIS given that entry to NEIS is highly competitive.

Table 1: Training and employment service cost comparisons

| Service | Duration | Costs | | | 'Success' Rate | Total cost per positive outcome |
|---|---|--|--|------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| | | Service costs | Outcome payments | Total | | |
| Job Network (JN) ¹ Intensive Support Assistance. (U/E 4 to 12 months) | 4 to 6 months of support | \$720 <i>(incl. 100 hrs of job search training)</i> | \$550 <i>(interim - paid when off benefits for 13 weeks)</i> | \$1,270 | 41.6% to 58.3% ⁵ (3 months after exit) | \$3,285 |
| JN Intensive Support Customised Assistance (U/E 13-18 months or 'highly disadvantaged') | 12 months of support | \$1,200 <i>(as above plus 2 review interviews)</i> | \$1,650 <i>(interim as above-13 wks)</i> plus \$825 <i>(final- off benefits for 26 wks)</i> | \$2,460 \$3,285 | | n/a |
| NEIS ² | Accredited training (7 wks) & 12 mths non means-tested income support | \$2,590 (paid after 7wks training, on positive assessment of business plan potential) | \$1,110 (paid 15mths after commencement if participant hasn't returned to Centrelink benefits) | \$3,700 | 80% (of 50% respondents) | From \$3,700 |
| JPET ³ | Up to 12 months | \$1500 (average cost per participant) | n/a | \$1500 | n/a | N/a |
| Work for the Dole ⁴ | Up to 6 months | \$2000 | n/a | \$2000 | n/a | n/a |
| Slingshot | 10 wks accredited training, business mentoring & 12 mths' case mgt support. | \$4,240 | | \$4,240 | 59% to 72% (4 months after training completion) ⁶ | \$5,888 to \$7,816 |

¹ Source: DEWR Employment Services Contract 2000-2006, pp.67-69. Assuming participants are on unemployment benefits and fully eligible for Job Network services.

² Source: Kelly, R, Lewis, P., Dockery, M. & Mulvey, C. 2001 *Findings in the NEIS Evaluation*, Report for DEWR/SB by the Centre for Labour Market Research, Murdoch University.

³ Source: Personal. Communication YWCA JPET.

⁴ Source: ACOSS 2000, 'Does Work for the Dole lead to work for wages? ACOSS Analysis', *ACOSS Info* 223, 28 November. Note: Estimate of average cost is for 2000 and includes the average cost of funding Community Work Coordinators who assess and refer people to Work for the Dole sponsors.

⁵ Source: Labour Market Assistance Outcomes, Year ending June 2003, DEWR (viewed on 24/6/04 at www.workplace.gov.au/workplace). These are the most recent published JN outcomes and are from the Job Network prior service structure changes made in July 2003. 'Positive outcomes' are full-time and part-time employment and education and training outcomes. 41.6% is the proportion of job seekers attracting the highest level of intensive assistance who achieved positive outcomes and 56.8% is the proportion of 21 to 24 year-olds in all levels of intensive assistance achieving positive outcomes.

⁶ See *Education, training and employment outcomes* section earlier in this report.

5. Key factors in program success

Summary of key success factors

Slingshot's program components combine to address a number of recognised barriers to young people's self-employment. Interviews and consultations suggest the success of the program is dependent on reducing a range of barriers faced by young people – addressing one type of barrier alone will not see young people entering self-employment successfully.

Problems young people face include:

- lack of business management skills (also a problem shared by older people);
- limited communication skills;
- less life and work experience than older people;
- fewer accumulated financial resources;
- limited access to business networks and contacts;
- fewer relevant role models (of young men and women in business);
- age discrimination (suppliers, banks, customers);
- managing business expansion and increasing market share; and
- coping with stress (lack of peer support and understanding) (White and Kenyon 2000, pp. 6-7)

Slingshot training begins to address problems related to a lack of business management skills. It also builds peer support networks and improves personal communication skills using group exercises and intensive contact. Guest speakers and field trips extend young people's business contacts, give them insights into running a business and providing business role models.

Mentoring and networking nights improve communication skills, expand young people's business networks, and allow young people access to mentors' wealth of business knowledge. Guest speakers and mentors also motivate, inspire and encourage the young people. Networking events give young people the opportunity to consolidate their peer support networks.

The Business Review Panel gives young people access to business advice – to help overcome barriers related to their lack of experience – and supports development of presentation skills, among other things.

The Slingshot loan scheme attempts to overcome financial barriers to self-employment.

Slingshot graduates who go on to success in self-employment are a valuable program resource and can act as good role models for new participants.

The case management component of the program is key to ensuring the optimum outcomes for young people. The case manager (the program manager) tracks the young person's progress and engagement with the program and identifies and addresses barriers and problems as they arise. The program manager encourages young people to explore ideas and pursue passions, aiding their decision-making processes.

The recent *Scoping Paper on Youth Entrepreneurship* (FaCS 2003, p. 61) notes that possible benefits of programs targeted specifically to young people are that they can:

- specialise in problem areas specific to young people;
- employ staff good at dealing with young people; and
- commit more time to young people, who often require more support than older people.

Slingshot does these things.

Key success factors in detail

Slingshot culture

Young people felt comfortable approaching all the people involved with Slingshot. Slingshot's friendly and welcoming culture helped ensure that participants had positive experiences and that they felt comfortable bringing their problems to the attention of staff and trainers. This suggests that barriers and problems were addressed as quickly as possible. One young person commented on the strong relationships between Slingshot staff and trainers, saying this meant they were consistent and that she felt happy to go to any of them with her questions or problems.

Some young people said that they appreciated the relaxed and supportive culture of Slingshot, with one young person saying:

No one really told us what to do. [They] just gave us advice and steered us a bit if we were going in the wrong direction.

Trainers and staff say Slingshot places importance on young people's ownership of their decisions. Slingshot aims to facilitate young people's decision-making by being supportive and listening to their ideas without being overly directive. While mentors serve as an important source of advice for the young people, Slingshot's mentor training emphasises that advice should be given in response to a request and that the 'do it my way' approach should be avoided.

Mentoring

Most young people enjoyed the mentoring aspect of the program and some said they thought mentoring was the best part of Slingshot.

Support from mentors

Mentors provided a range of assistance including: enthusiasm and interest that kept young people motivated; business advice and new ideas; someone to bounce ideas off; someone to help them think about their goals; information about other people's career paths; introductions to new business contacts; and someone who was willing to help them. These various supports helped young people make decisions about their pathways, and, in some cases, stay motivated to see these decisions through. For mentors another important role was providing a reality check.

A few young people mentioned the important role their new business networks and contacts played in their successes. One mentor said 'the most valuable thing about the mentor role was for the young person to have a connection to the business world'. The mentor trainer

similarly commented that the contacts and exposure a mentor can provide to a young person are key to their successes.

Mentor selection and training

Interest in engaging with a young person on a one-on-one basis; enough time to devote to the young person; experience in business; a non-judgemental approach; and ‘a level of personal confidence, not confident that they can do the job well, but [that they] like themselves’ were identified by the program manager and/or mentor trainer as some criteria for a successful mentors. Some mentors commented that having practical business experience helped increase the value of the mentor relationship

The structure of the Slingshot mentor training was regarded as a positive factor by many in the project. Mentors commented that the mentor training addressed any concerns they had and helped them to understand their new role. The mentor trainer believed the connections made between mentors through these sessions helped strengthen the support networks available to the young people. Some young people also mentioned that having the opportunity to speak to different mentors was helpful as they could seek specific advice, canvas different opinions about their business ideas, and extend their business networks.

The mentor trainer also commented that when the program changed to have mentors and young people attending mentor training nights together the program had lower drop-out rates. She believed this was because it was less easy for a young person to drop out of the program ‘when you knew the person you were standing up’. Further, it helped overcome problems with the young people being ‘suspicious’ of the mentor as it explained their role better and gave the young person a chance to meet them and begin to establish their relationship in a group situation. The program manager said training the mentors with the young people made the program more inclusive, and gave mentors a better idea of the challenges young people faced.

The program manager’s involvement in these evenings was seen to be important by the mentor trainer as it maintained connections between the program manager and the mentors. This meant that mentors were able to let her know as concerns arose, and she often mediated between mentors and young people when problems occurred to help keep the relationship on track.

Network of mentors

The network of mentors gives young people a pool of people they can draw on for advice and business support. Even if the young people do not draw on that support immediately, the fact they feel that the support exists, and they could access it if they wanted to pursue their business idea, means there is one less barrier to overcome.

Many of the mentors we spoke to commented that relationships with other mentors were helpful for emotional support and practical advice. One commented that mentors who were having some problems with the young people they were mentoring enjoyed hearing positive stories from others and this may have helped keep them engaged with Slingshot. Mentors from one intake group met up unofficially to give each other support. On the benefit of being able to talk to other mentors, one mentor said ‘sometimes it’s just a little frustration that you need to express and it’s not worth upsetting other people [like Slingshot staff] about it’.

Small business training

Content and style of training

The training content and style align well with research findings concerning good entrepreneurship training with a recent review stressing the importance of practical, experiential learning that is flexible, interactive and closely aligned with the 'real world' (FaCS 2003, p.66).

Delivery is centred on the development of individual business plans, using a business plan template, which is regarded by trainers as the key to the success of the training. The template provides something practical the young people can work with and focus on from the outset and it enables 'all of the learning strategies [to be] built around the young person's own business idea.' Trainers report that using the business plan template gives young people an overview of what it takes to set up a business. They use it to identify gaps in their thinking and knowledge to date and to decide if they want to continue on a self-employment pathway.

Young people were generally happy with the 'laid back' style of the training and found the trainers friendly and approachable. They found it was not pressured and could engage with the learning at their own pace and according to their interests. A few young people suggested they would have liked the training to be more structured, with one suggesting assignments would have helped her focus. A couple commented that some of their less dedicated and interested peers were disruptive.

The training setting and location

The setting of the training is seen by trainers and program staff to impact on young people's participation levels. One trainer remarked that when choosing a setting, it is important to recognise that 'the group doesn't want to be in a classroom' or to be reminded too much of school and their (often) negative experiences there. To address this, the training is 'run more like a business seminar' [than a class] to let the young people know Slingshot is a business program'.

As many participants were from the western suburbs of Melbourne, Footscray was a very accessible location and when the training moved from the Western Business Enterprise Centre to Victoria University's city campus the young people had access to a wider range of facilities. Access to class space has not always been good as it has not provided individual use of computers seen as key by the trainers to optimum training delivery.

The trainers

Training is seen to work best when trainers have practical business experience to draw on, are flexible and versatile individuals, are participant focused, and treat young people with respect. Trainers and the program manager believe practical business experience is critical to program success. They report this experience allows them to 'see niches' for young people and their business ideas and to help young people see possibilities. Trainers also need to have good industry contacts and, as one trainer put it, to 'be networkers themselves, to bring their contacts from the business community to the young people as guest speakers and during field trips'.

The program manager and trainers identified some specific qualities they believe the trainers need to possess. Trainers have to be able to negotiate a dynamic learning environment. Young people ask novel and difficult questions during training and may respond to material

in unexpected ways. Young people's attendance may vary, requiring information to be gone through more than once. Trainers must also be friendly, approachable people who communicate well with young people and respect them.

Assessment

Slingshot trainers practice 'continuous assessment', using the time they spend with young people to gather evidence that individuals understand the issues and have the required competencies. Trainers use the exercises young people work on and complete in training and group discussions to inform assessment thus ensuring as many young people as possible complete and pass the training modules. One suggestion from program staff was that, in order to improve training pass rates, assessment (competency testing) could also be carried out at other program junctures. For example, young people could be assessed at mentor training nights and at the Business Review Panel.

Program manager's involvement in training

Regular contact between the training co-ordinator and the Slingshot program manager is seen as a key to ensuring young people's success at the training. Through this contact trainers communicate issues to Slingshot staff and they are addressed quickly. The program manager checks in at training once a day to see how young people are going and to 'actively problem-solve'.

Program manager and staff

Most stakeholders in Slingshot identified a passionate and committed program manager, with excellent people skills, networking capacity and ability to communicate with and support young people, as essential to the success of the program. Similarly, a recent review identifies the value of having a 'champion' to take personal ownership of the program initiative (2003, p. 58).

The program manager believes that close initial and ongoing contact with each young person and with the mentors is important for keeping track of, and responding to, challenges that may arise during the relationship. Mentors said they appreciated the responsiveness of staff to people's needs and also their openness and pragmatism.

The program manager is currently responsible for maintaining and extending service and industry networks and relationships, for promoting and running the program and for recruiting young people and mentors. This person is at the heart of the program and many of those involved with Slingshot identified increased resources and support for the program manager as the key to increasing the program's success. The program manager identified a need for an additional staff member (or other support) to recruit mentors and to build and maintain networks.

Agency qualities and resources

A strong agency (Melbourne Citymission) support base was seen as important to the program's success and most involved with the program identified a welfare or youth-focussed agency connection as important. Slingshot's location in the same building as health, legal, housing and employment services for young people is seen to have benefited Slingshot participants as well as to have facilitated appropriate referrals to the program. Several management committee members and a trainer stressed the importance of any auspicing agency for Slingshot having a value base that was similar to Slingshot's and being an organisation in which the needs of disadvantaged young people were understood.

The program manager believes the more welcoming and resourced the program base is, the more likely it is young people will stay engaged with the program. Provision of computers, telephones, photocopiers, faxes, couches and tea/coffee making facilities were all suggested as important and necessary resources, including for increasing young people's contacts with program staff. Staff commented that young people are more likely to use a service if it does not require travelling far.

Participant financial assistance

Securing adequate start-up funds has been found to be a common problem for young people starting businesses, frequently lead to under-capitalisation (White and Kenyon 2000, p. 7). While few young people have used the Slingshot loan scheme the program manager says it is key to the program in that its existence reassures young people of their ability to access the funds necessary to set up their business. The scheme helps to remove 'lack of funds' as an insurmountable barrier to self-employment. It demonstrates that money is available for them to 'take the next step' if they decided to go ahead with their business idea. The loan application process is quite rigorous though a potential benefit of this is that the young person is linked into mainstream banking and so can begin to build a credit rating.

While none of the young people we spoke to had taken advantage of the loan scheme some said it was a good idea because they it would be difficult for a young person to get a loan from a bank. One young person, who was a Slingshot participant prior to the loan's introduction, said it would have helped him buy all the equipment he needed at once rather than having to buy it a piece at a time. Both the young people and staff commented that young people preferred to avoid getting into debt and were likely to choose employment over a loan.

The fact that so few participants had taken out a Slingshot loan suggests that the positive program outcomes achieved so far did not depend on this component. It also suggests that a majority of Slingshot graduates may not be at a stage in their business concept development where taking out a loan is an appropriate option. This is supported by comments from the program manager who noted that some young people who completed Slingshot a couple of years ago are only now ready to invest in their business and apply for loans.

Networks

Lack of support and business networks for young people are identified as major barriers to young people's success in self-employment (FaCS 2003, p. 71). Slingshot overcomes this barrier by training the young people in small groups.

Having friends in the program was reported as likely to strengthen young people's participation and attendance. Young people, staff and trainers mentioned other positive outcomes of strengthening peer support networks that improve individuals' chances of success. These included: sharing information, giving advice, cooperating, exchanging opinions, gathering market information, and providing support and encouragement.

Slingshot staff and committee of management members said that having a mix of young people in each participant group is important for Slingshot's success. The mix largely concerned levels of disadvantage, with importance placed on having a group that was made up of both more and less skilled young people. This mix is seen to help the group dynamic,

making sure that the young people involved are able to help and inspire each other. One mentor also noted the importance of having a mix of young people:

Having really motivated people in the group helps to bring along some of those that aren't always motivated. This is really important. I guess it's like having role models and friendly competition. The mentors and speakers can do that as well but people need to have it in their own peer group.

Networking events are another opportunity Slingshot provides for business networks to be expanded and supportive relationships formed. It allows some young people to re-establish relationships and contacts and become re-energised about their business idea. For young people who have started a business, or have been working towards a start-up, it provides an opportunity to promote their business services and seek advice and new contacts.

Service networks

Slingshot's strong service and industry networks are seen as one key to program success by most people involved in the program. They are essential to mentor and participant recruitment and to ensuring adequate support for disadvantaged young people with specific needs. As one young person said 'if (the program manager) can't help you she will find someone who can'.

Slingshot's strong relationships with the training provider Victoria University and with the mentor trainer are also essential to the program.

Guest speakers and role models

Guest speakers at the training and at mentor evenings are selected to provide inspiration, motivation and role models for the young people. Most young people commented on the positive impact of these guest speakers. The benefits of guest speakers are noted in research findings where it is also suggested that role models play a key part in promoting self-employment among young people (FaCS 2003, p. 59).

Slingshot graduates who have successfully gone into self-employment are seen to be excellent role models for other Slingshot participants. The program manager believes these young people are significant in motivating other participants and promoting and publicising Slingshot.

6. Issues and areas for development

Program issues

Staffing levels

Most people consulted about the program identified low staffing levels as a concern. For the program manager this appears to have become a particular problem when Slingshot became an incorporated entity with governance and management structures requiring additional work. It has been suggested that a program run on a similar basis (i.e. as an incorporated entity with a committee of management) requires at least two full-time staff to undertake the multitude of recruitment, networking, program evaluation and administration tasks that ideally would be carried out. Increased staff would also reduce the risk of program collapse in the event that the program manager needs some time off, by spreading the responsibility a bit wider. Areas that were identified by program partners and staff as benefiting from more staff attention include the challenging and time-consuming task of recruiting mentors; general administrative tasks, ongoing development of business networks including to gain additional funding; reviewing program outcomes, improving relationships with Job Network providers; and freeing up the program manager to participate more in training.

Recruitment

Lack of resources may also have contributed to problems recruiting young people to the program. The program target group is small and a wide net needs to be spread to inform and attract participants. This requires ongoing work to build and maintain networks and contacts with Job Network providers, Centrelink officers, and JPET providers among others.

Space and resources

Slingshot would benefit from being located in a larger, more welcoming space, with additional facilities for participants including computers, a fax, a photocopier, and a telephone. This could also encourage young people to stay in contact with program staff as they would be more likely to drop in. Ideally, the space would also have tea and coffee making facilities and couches to relax and chat on.

Further, having a space where young people can work on their business may facilitate networking between different groups of participants, which has not happened much at Slingshot networking evenings. This will be tested at the new Slingshot enterprise incubator.

Mentors and mentoring

Young people said they would like to be more closely matched to mentors in their industry area of interest, to allow them to seek more specific business advice. The mentors we spoke to also suggested this type of matching would be good as it would give them a common interest to base their relationship on. (nb. This would rely on program ability to recruit more mentors).

There are some grey areas concerning the role and accountability of mentors in the Slingshot program. A key issue is mentor accountability/liability when providing business advice to young people. Another is about ending the mentoring relationship -do people get sufficient closure and could this be better facilitated by better guidelines or procedures?

An issue for a few of the mentors we spoke to was that they entered the program with the belief that their role was to provide business advice to a young person with a business idea. These mentors believed that some Slingshot participants were not at a stage where they could benefit from practical business advice. They felt that the sort of support needed by some young people who had a lot of personal issues to overcome before they could realistically think about starting a business was something they were not able to provide. Another concern about the mentor role related was that mentors, may not feel able to actively discourage young people from taking big risks (for example, renting a business premise without a clear idea of how to establish the business) and that there was a lot of pressure on young people and mentors 'not to fail'.

One mentor suggested a mentor support process should be included in the program, another said mentor networks could be better facilitated by the program.

Development of business networks

While there was no clear consensus on the need for increased work to develop a stronger network of business people some people held very strong views that this was required. One argument for a stronger network was to increase opportunities for corporate funding and other contributions to the program. Another argument was as a network for the young people themselves and to increase mentor recruitment.

Accredited small business training

Some participants found the training too basic, and felt it could have been more in-depth or more applied. Given the diversity in education backgrounds of participants - with some university educated and many who did not complete high school - it is difficult to know what to do about this issue. As there are benefits derived from training the young people in a group perhaps having another trainer present to provide more individual assistance to those struggling or to those who could extend themselves would benefit the young people.

The methods used to assess the accredited training modules could potentially be expanded. With more staff, and the development of assessment tools, young people could be assessed on their competencies while at other Slingshot events. Mentor training nights or networking events may be appropriate times.

As there are benefits derived from training the young people in a group perhaps having another trainer present to provide more individual assistance to those struggling or to those who could extend themselves would benefit the young people.

Network evenings

There were some minor issues with network events related to attendance and opportunities for people to mix. Some suggestions were made that they could be improved by:

- working to encourage better attendance by mentors;
- better facilitating mixing between young people, guest speakers and mentors; and
- ensuring they are held in a comfortable and friendly venue.

Loan Scheme

There is some concern that the loan application process needed to be simplified to make it easier for young people to access funds, however there was no feedback from the young people that to suggest a simplified scheme would have encouraged them to take advantage of it.

Target group

A number of stakeholders identified some tension - in some cases understood as a contradiction or lack of clarity of goals - between ensuring disadvantaged young people were targeted to participate and achieving successful program outcomes. For others this tension was seen as an unavoidable feature of an ambitious program, and a mix of participants was seen as necessary for the program to achieve positive outcomes for many of the young people involved. One negative impact for some participants which could be addressed is that the training was experienced as boring.

Program timeline

The program goals and the program model are consistent with the notion of providing support and guidance to some participants for a period longer than 12 months, particularly to those who continue to pursue self-employment pathways. While extending assistance beyond 12 months could be prohibitive some young people may be able to be supported through more active ongoing networking and referral services if the program operated with increased staffing.

Work experience/shadowing

A need for work experience for some participants was identified by a number of people involved with the program. Work experience or work shadowing opportunities could improve many young people's skills and are likely also to improve program outcomes – both in terms of employability and level of business experience. These may be able to be facilitated through the program's industry networks. Insurance cover has presented a barrier to work experience to date however there are a number of ways in which this issue can be addressed.

Program planning, governance and management

The Slingshot committee of management developed from an advisory body with representation from key project funding bodies. Some stakeholders, including committee members, commented that the skills and networks of committee members could have been used more as an important program resource. There was also some interest in gaining the input of trainers, mentors and young people in program decision-making processes. There was also a view that the committee could have played a more significant role in developing business networks and thus recruiting mentors. Several people interviewed commented that, in very small organisations such as Slingshot, an important role for committee of management members is to resource and support project staff.

Slingshot's policy and program influence

Program funding

As noted earlier a small number of stakeholders believed that Slingshot could have attracted substantially more funding and increased its reach had it been able to attract some key business people from the corporate sector to be 'champions' of the program.

Advocacy and the role of the committee of management

A number of people commented that, other than through demonstration, Slingshot activities had not specifically been directed to advocating for policy and program change. Management Committee efforts directed to increasing influence were seen to be mainly in

regard to the planned roll out of the program to a number of locations. A small number of people consulted saw potential for the management committee to have played a great role advocating for self employment assistance for young people.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

Lessons from Slingshot

The Slingshot program has recruited and assisted a diverse range of young people each of whom came to the program with an idea – often a passion - and a desire to pursue this through self-employment. Many of these young people have attempted to pursue their ideas through NEIS but have not been able to gain entry. Some had previously looked for self-employment assistance without success and many had assumed they would not be able to pursue their ideas due to lack of support.

Slingshot has played an important role for these young people and the program clearly meets a need not addressed by other employment and training programs. This is especially the case for disadvantaged young people whose access to other supports is limited and who may have little experience of success in other education and work contexts. Slingshot acts as a pre-NEIS program for many young people who have been or would be likely to be unsuccessful gaining entry to NEIS.

Slingshot has achieved positive employment, education and training outcomes for participants and, given the high level of support and assistance provided and the relative disadvantage of the program target group, is a cost-effective program meeting an identified need for a small group of young people. At the same time Slingshot performs a broader transition support role for young people, ensuring individual needs are met through an intensive and holistic approach. As such, for some young people interested in self-employment Slingshot provides a ‘next step’ from JPET. For other young people, especially those not in positive education, training or work situations, it provides skills, knowledge and networks to enable them to develop pathways to self-employment and/or other options.

Slingshot’s achievements in providing young people with the skills and confidence to forge their own pathways are impressive. Young people report very positive outcomes in this regard, and the initial destinations data show much increased engagement in work and study activities as well as ongoing involvement of many young people in self-employment and small business development activities.

The experience of Slingshot suggests there is an important role for such programs. The program environment that existed when Slingshot came into being in 2000 has changed little. If anything, with the demise of approval by Centrelink for unemployed people to undertake self employment activities (i.e. SEDS), there are now fewer options for young people interested in self-employment than there were in 2000.

While young people share many of the problems the general population experience in small business development, they require somewhat different responses to address the specific challenges of their age including limited life and work experience, skills and networks. They also require responses which build on their potential as young people (Kenyon & White 2000).

At a broad level enterprise education, small business skills development and fostering of innovation continue to be targets for attention to increase human capital and to enable effective competition in a global economy. At the same time employment and training

policies and program responses directed to young people do not currently include self-employment programs for those young people who specifically want to consider this form of employment. In these contexts there is a strong case for small business development for young people.

Self-employment programs such as Slingshot can fulfill a particular role which needs to be clearly distinguished from that of broader enterprise education for young people. While there are many good reasons while the latter should be more widely available and part of broader enterprise and youth policies (see for example FaCS scoping paper, FaCS 2003), they are not the same as self-employment programs for young people. Slingshot and similar types of programs can fill a particular niche for young people who already have an interest which can be pursued through self-employment as a positive career option. As Kenyon and White have put it they start from the basis that ‘successful enterprise development begins with initiative. Initiative coming, that is, from the young men and women themselves.

The potential for the achievements of the Slingshot program as a workable pilot to influence policy and program change is still to be realised. With the discontinuation of Slingshot as an independent body it is important that Slingshot stakeholders ensure that the achievements and lessons from the program are used as a basis for seeking government support for self employment assistance for young people.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Slingshot partners pursue the reinstatement of self employment development activities as approved activities for Newstart and Youth Allowance recipients, with the Federal Government.

It is recommended that the Slingshot partners approach the Federal Government and advocate for the introduction of funding for community employment and youth agencies to provide self-employment development assistance to disadvantaged young people interested in small business, in partnership with registered training organisations.

Program development and improvement

A range of issues and areas for program improvement and development have been identified in this paper. The immediate continuation of the Slingshot by Melbourne Citymission at its new enterprise incubator has provided an opportunity for the program manager to deal with many of these issues.

A key factor behind Slingshot’s success is the integration of various program components in a responsive and flexible way to address a range of personal support, guidance and small business development needs. The program successfully combined the critical elements of transition programs for disadvantaged young people with many of the key features of small business development support programs.

At the same time, a number of stakeholders identified some tension inherent in the program in relation to achieving successful self employment outcomes while targeting disadvantaged young people as participants. Strong views were expressed by those closest to the program that a mix of young people is most likely to lead to success. In the light of this, and also

because the target group of young people is small, it is important that all young people interested in self employment are given the opportunity to access the program. A key characteristic of the Slingshot program is its flexibility in regard to entry with a strong emphasis on individual motivation and interest.

A very strong theme emerging from the individual young people's stories is the role the program played in assisting them to develop the self belief and confidence needed to set and pursue their own goals. While for some people these impacts do not translate into immediate employment and training outcomes, it is likely that the long-term benefits to individuals will be significant.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Slingshot providers review and address program issues and areas for development identified in this paper, with particular attention to ensuring adequate staffing and to the development of recruitment strategies.

It is recommended that Slingshot partners, in promoting and providing Slingshot and self-employment programs for young people in the future, continue to advocate for flexible entry to these programs.

It is recommended that program providers maintain a focus on the development of individual pathways plans as appropriate measures of program outcomes.

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Appendix One

Interviews and consultations undertaken

Semi-structured telephone interviews with participants and mentors

Participant contacts

| | |
|--|----|
| No. of young people interviewed | 14 |
| No of young people with whom contact attempted but not made* | 43 |
| No. of young people no attempt at contact made | 5 |

Mentor contacts

| | |
|--|----|
| No. of mentors interviewed | 8 |
| No. of mentors with whom contact attempted but not made* | 23 |
| no. of mentors no contact attempted | 12 |

*on average more than one attempt

Note: the Slingshot Mentor Evaluation (Intake Five) undertaken in late 2003 was used to supplement interview material from mentors.

Face-to face or telephone consultations with project partners and stakeholders

| Name | Role |
|----------------|--|
| Ann Howie | Slingshot program manager |
| John Spierings | Member, Committee of Management (Dusseldorp Skills Forum) |
| Nik Zakula | Training Co-ordinator (Victoria University, Western Business Enterprise Centre) |
| Tim Cremean | NEIS Provider (Manager of Business Enterprise Centre) |
| Donna White | Mentor Trainer (Donna White Consulting) |
| Graeme Chipp | Chair, Committee of Management (Growth Solutions Group) |
| Elaine Egan | Training Co-ordinator (Victoria University, Western Business Enterprise Centre) |
| Sally James | Member, Committee of Management (Melbourne Citymission) |
| Phillip Gray | Member, Committee of Management |
| Ann Morrow | Member, Committee of Management (Dusseldorp Skills Forum) |