

**LOCAL INVESTMENT. NATIONAL RETURNS.  
The Case for Community Support for Early School  
Leavers**

**Case Studies**

# CENTRAL COAST YOUTH COMMITMENT

## The Central Coast in New South Wales

<b>Partnership Area:</b>	Gosford & Wyong Local Government areas
<b>Secondary Schools:</b>	22 government and non-government schools
<b>Approximate Population:</b>	292,000

---

## Characteristics of the Central Coast

The Central Coast lies midway between Sydney and Newcastle on the NSW coast and encompasses around 30 kilometers of coastline. The region has been characterized by:

- rapid population growth over the past fifteen years, particularly in the youth and older age populations.
- large numbers of families moving into the region
- higher rates of unemployment than NSW and Australian average
- long-term low levels of education attainment
- a lack of cost-effective public transport

In 2001, when the Youth Commitment project commenced, there were approximately 18,000 young people aged 15-19 years of age in the region. They are provided with education and training services by 22 government and non-government secondary schools, and by the Ourimbah University and Institute of TAFE with campuses located at Ourimbah, Wyong and Gosford delivering higher education and training

## Key Features of Central Coast Youth Commitment

- The introduction of transition brokers in four Central Coast schools who are providing support for young people and improving local knowledge on outcomes for all students leaving school before completing Year 12 by tracking their destinations and pathways
- Collaborating with a number of stakeholders to help establish alternative learning centres for young people. These are catering both for students at school who are at risk of disengaging, as well as for those who have already disengaged. Alternative Learning Centres have been established at Tumbi Umbi and at Peninsula, and further centres are being planned.
- Exploring and implementing community-based transport solutions to help young people stay connected with education and employment opportunities on the Central Coast.

- Tracking the destinations and pathways of all early school leavers on the Central Coast through a combination of transition brokers in four schools and the Triple C project that tracks all other school leavers in the other schools, using a common data management system.
- The involvement of the business sector in the operations, management and financing of the Youth Commitment.

## **Background**

There were many youth services and initiatives on the Central Coast prior to the formation of the Youth Commitment partnership, but there was also a general recognition of limited capacity to integrate and link these services and projects together.

A Community Forum was initiated by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum (DSF), the Central Coast Area Consultative Committee and the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEF) in May 2001 to determine whether there was interest in establishing a Youth Commitment partnership. The outcome was the formation of a Steering Committee comprised of key industry and agency representatives.

A Memorandum of Understanding formalised in May 2002 between the Central Coast Youth Commitment Steering Committee and the national agencies, resulted in an agreement to work together to significantly improve the learning and work opportunities of young people leaving school on the Central Coast. An environmental scan commissioned to document the situation of young people in the region reported to a Community Forum held in August 2002. The environmental scan was reported to be a useful process, mapping the landscape and providing key recommendations.

The Central Coast Youth Commitment became incorporated in May 2003. The Central Coast Youth Commitment Board of Management, its working groups, and project coordinator work to a Strategic Plan that is reviewed annually. The working groups helped to develop the strategic plan and have full ownership. The Board oversees the strategic plan as well as providing direction and leadership for the organization.

From 2003, ECEF (now DEST) agreed to provide \$390,000 over 3 years to meet the costs of project coordination and to trial transition brokers.

The Central Coast has been particularly successful in establishing a Board that has strong industry and business representation, as well as the participation of both local government areas, and key government agencies.

## **Central Coast Management Committee**

- Albany International Pty Ltd
- Brilliant Logic
- Central Coast Health

- Ourimbah University and Institute of TAFE (Central Coast Campus)
- Centrelink
- Department of Education
- DOCs/Better Futures
- DSF
- Gosford Council
- Krone Pty Ltd
- Lend Lease
- P&C Federation
- Premiers Department
- Central Coast Area Consultative Committee (ACC)
- Wyong Council

Many of these organizations also provide other forms of in-kind support. In-kind free legal support has been provided by Central Coast Lawyers. The Area Consultative Committee (ACC) provides financial management services. Administrative costs are also minimized in other ways. The project coordinator works from a home-based office, and meetings are hosted by various local agencies.

The commitment of local industry to the Youth Commitment and the concept of the transition brokers in particular was evident when various companies provided \$30,000 to establish interim transition broker positions until Commonwealth Government funding became available. Six local businesses each provided \$5,000 for this purpose. One of the local governments involved later contributed another \$22,000 to appoint a further transition worker.

The Central Coast Youth Commitment reports against five key areas, and uses working parties to progress a number of the following:

- data collection and reporting arrangements
- school retention
- entry into the workforce
- transport
- sustainable arrangements.

Data management is based on implementing a common data management software system across the region for use by transition brokers, alternative learning centres and other government initiated tracking projects. A control site has also been established to provide a stronger basis for assessing the effect of introducing transition brokers.

Improving school retention is based on the introduction of transition brokers to local schools, the implementation of student intention and destination surveys, and strengthened referral arrangements with relevant support services and community organizations.

Facilitating entry to the workforce for young people has focused on increasing the availability and take-up of New Apprenticeships, compiling local data on sectors of local employment growth and on the training expectations of employers, and analyzing the

career information needs of young people. Media marketing campaigns promoting youth employment have targeted local employers, and various careers and small business Expos have been used to raise awareness.

Developing and piloting alternative transport arrangements to support young people access education, training and employment has been funded by the NSW Premiers Department. One of the key initiatives is a proposed Moped Loan Scheme, the feasibility of which is still under investigation.

### **Achievements**

The main outcomes that the Central Coast can point to after two years are the impact of the transition workers, and the series of alternative learning settings being established within existing school structures.

In 2004 **transition brokers** operated in four schools on the Central Coast. School Principals involved are very positive about the impact that the transition brokers are having on outcomes for potential early school leavers, as are representatives on the Youth Commitment management committee. A Youth Forum held in the first half of 2004 provided testimony from young people of the impact that the transition brokers were having on the level of support available and on their decision-making. There are reported to be significant improvement in rates of retention occurring in those schools as a result of transition brokerage.

The Central Coast Youth Commitment strategy is also strongly focused on supporting piloting **alternative learning centres** for young people. These are catering both for students at risk of disengaging from school, and those who have already left. Alternative Learning Centres have been established at Tumbi Umbi and at Peninsula. Tumbi Umbi Alternative Learning Program is an example of a program made possible by strong community support. The school was able to provide a staffing allowance for a coordinator, while other resources were provided by the Department of Education and Training as well as some community in-kind support.

The Youth Commitment also supports existing alternative programs such as POEMS which the transition brokers utilise for referrals. The experience of the brokers suggests that services provided through pilots such as POEMS need to be expanded as some young people referred by brokers for assistance are unable to gain access.

### **Impact on services**

Although the transition brokers have only been operating in schools on the Central Coast for approximately twelve months, local principals indicate that the brokers are having some wider influence on those schools. The availability of more detailed information on student needs and pathways is starting to influence related activity within the schools. As an example, in 2004 one school has introduced a one hour period of careers each week for all students in Year 10 as a result of the information supplied by the transition broker,

and the school is also investigating the introduction of an alternative Year 10. There are now also consistent exit procedures in the four schools with transition brokers

The Principal of one of the schools reported that ... *“having a broker has given me a lot more awareness of the services that are outside the school.”*

Another of the Management Committee representatives reported that ... *“breaking down the barriers between agencies in general has been a really positive benefit to come out of the process. Schools are letting other agencies come in to their settings, and agencies such as Health, Community Services, are all in there working collaboratively. Its also pleasing to see State and Commonwealth funding being used together to help set up alternative learning centres.”*

Local government is also demonstrating practical responses to the Youth Commitment. Not only are councils contributing funding to increase the number of transition brokers on the Central Coast, but in addition Wyong Council recently appointed four trainees to the staff, a development attributed by the Manager of Community Services to the influence of the Youth Commitment.

The general community is also contributing to the new alternative learning programs. Tumbi Umbi Alternative Learning Program was established by the school funding resources with a coordinator, but the rest of the resources required were provided through in-kind support from the community.

## **The Approach**

The Central Coast Youth Commitment Inc partnership has a strong base of business membership and has tried to adopt a strategic approach to improving outcomes for young people in the region. As an example, management of the transition brokerage role was contracted out to the major local youth services provider (although contractual issues have arisen which at this time are still in the process of being resolved).

The structure of the partnership enables many small independent services to link together under one umbrella. Collaborative approaches have led to an improved use of resources and the development of greater capacity to engage government with a collective voice rather than as separate agencies.,

Regular presentations on progress have helped to generate a level of community ownership and the partnership has focused on transition brokerage as a very tangible program that could quickly demonstrate an impact. The intention is to expand transition brokerage to a point where there could be ten or more brokers working across schools on the Central Coast.

## **Challenges**

The Central Coast has been implementing the Youth Commitment for approximately three years, and has had transition brokers in schools for just over 15 months. Most of those involved consider that it is still relatively early to be able to assess the impact of the Commitment on improving outcomes for young people.

It reportedly took more than a year to begin to overcome local fears in some quarters of the partnership agenda of the Youth Commitment. The competitive environment for government funding, particularly when small amounts are involved for short periods of time, has proved a difficult base on which to build trust and confidence.

In addition there are particular issues on the Central Coast which have presented particular challenges for the Youth Commitment. The experience of those involved in the management of the Central Coast Youth Commitment is that they are operating in an environment that lacks a strong connection to broader policy directions and government decisions. Despite the provision of Commonwealth funding, there has been little direct contact between the partnership and DEST. There is also confusion over the approach of the Commonwealth in simultaneously funding the Youth Commitment as a partnership arrangement and the Youth Connections service to develop partnerships based around structured workplace learning and related transition services.

The management of the transition brokers has provided an illustration of these difficulties. Contractual issues arose between the agency selected to manage the brokers and the Youth Commitment Board which led to an impasse. While the agency was a member of the Youth Commitment Board, it is also a major service provider for young people on the Central Coast and is funded by governments to deliver a range of transition and partnership services. The Youth Commitment Board has resumed the direct management of brokers in the short term while seeking other contracting options.

The introduction of transition brokers into local schools has also met some resistance. Schools in New South Wales have full-time careers teachers, some of whom have raised industrial issues challenging the transition role. These appeared to be based on concerns that the transition brokers would take over the career adviser role. Having carefully clarified the role of the transition brokers in the four schools, the earlier concerns appear to have been allayed with careers staff and transition brokers now reported to be generally working well together.

## **MAIN OUTCOMES**

The initial data provided by the two full-time transition brokers on the Central Coast provides detailed information on the destinations of school leavers from the two schools in 2003.

The brokers report that the use of surveys and structured identification processes are resulting in more students being identified as being “at risk” of early school leaving in the schools, but that fewer are actually deciding to leave.

Through the individual work being done with these students by the transition brokers, the principals are identifying a core group of students who are not academic and who need a more “hands on” curriculum in the school.

A working party which includes the transition broker at Brisbane Waters Secondary College has been created to investigate and propose a suitable course that could be implemented for disengaged Year 10 students at the Senior Campus of Brisbane Water Secondary College. A framework of providing “age appropriate” education that meets the needs of students and leads to a School Certificate (or equivalent) is being explored. Options being explored include “No Dole”, “Life Skills” and other Transition Education programs.

# **GOLD COAST YOUTH COMMITMENT**

## **The Gold Coast, Queensland**

<b>Partnership Area:</b>	Gold Coast Local Government Area
<b>Secondary Schools:</b>	34 government and non-government schools
<b>Approximate Population:</b>	438,000

---

## **Characteristics of the Gold Coast**

The Gold Coast is situated south of Brisbane close to the border with New South Wales. The region has been characterised by: \_

- rapid population growth (and is Australia's fastest growing city)
- high mobility of labour
- the transient nature of the population
- absence of family support structures for many people.

In addition to the 34 government and non-government secondary schools in the region, education and training services are provided by four universities, the Gold Coast Institute of TAFE, and a range of private Registered Training Organisations. In 2001, when the Youth Commitment was first initiated on the Gold Coast, there were approximately 27,000 young people aged between 15 and 19 in the region.

## **Key Features of Gold Coast Youth Commitment**

- Introduction of three transition brokers working in seven schools since the middle of 2003, with two of these brokers working with students in five schools in Years 8 and 9 as an early intervention strategy. The brokers are reporting changed student intentions as a result of their assistance.
- Negotiation and oversight of an Innovative and Collaborative Youth Servicing (ICYS) pilot program for 12 months ending in September 2003 that involved four elements: \_
  - a seamless transition trial involving three schools and TAFE Youth Service
  - a resource pool (including a services database and youth training)
  - an 1800 information line for young people (Youthlink)
  - Plan-it-Youth mentoring program for students at risk.

- Formation of a ‘Community Reference Group’ to improve regular exchange of information and coordination between agencies involved in transition and support for young people.
- Arranging separate Youth and Business forums to discuss key issues, identify barriers to youth employment, and identify innovative projects that partner business and youth
- Formation of a ‘Business Reference Group’ to develop initiatives to increase the involvement of the business community in supporting the Queensland Government's Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF) agenda and providing pathways for young people to traineeships, apprenticeships and employment.

## **Background**

The Gold Coast Youth Commitment was first discussed late in 2000. Initiated through discussions between the South Coast Industry Schools Coordinating Organisation (SCISCO - is the local schools industry partnership organization that delivers JPP, workplace learning, School-Based New Apprenticeships and related school-industry services), and the national Youth Commitment sponsors, a community forum was organized and an interim Steering Committee formed.

The Committee commissioned an Environmental Scan, the results of which were presented to the community in June 2001. Smaller service agencies usually lack the resources to undertake their own research, and the capacity of the Youth Commitment to commission a regional overview of information through the Environmental Scan provided a key resource for many agencies

The first service initiatives commenced in 2002, primarily as a result of a successful application for an Innovative and Collaborative Youth Servicing (ICYS) pilot project. However, as the partnership was not yet an incorporated entity, the contract with government to deliver the ICYS project was signed with SCISCO. The Steering Committee was replaced by a Management Committee in order to involve the strategic leaders in the community and Incorporation was finalised in November 2002.

## **Current Youth Commitment Management Committee**

- Centrelink Biggera Waters
- Eagleby Learning Centre
- Gold Coast & Region ACC
- Gold Coast City Council
- Gold Coast Corporate Club
- Gold Coast Institute of TAFE
- Innovation Showcase Pty Ltd
- Keebra Park State High School
- Mission Australia
- Riviera Marine Group
- SCISCO Career Pathways
- St Michael's College
- Youth at Risk Alliance

Four reference / advisory groups were established based on Business, Community, Data Management, and Youth Advice.

Offices for the coordination of the Youth Commitment are provided by the Gold Coast & Region Area Consultative Committee (ACC). After two years of operation, relationships across the sectors have developed to the point where the Youth Commitment is now seen as 'credible' by most of the main agencies.

In addition to the core grant of \$390,000 over three years from DEST for establishment, management & trial initiatives, and \$85,000 from the Queensland Government to further support transition broker trials, the Gold Coast City Council has made several small grants to partnership forums and a wide range of organisations have provided venues for meetings and catered for events.

Some of the main initiatives involving the Youth Commitment on the Gold Coast have brought together a range of organisations to provide resources and support to projects such as the trial of a youth support coordinator role in schools, and the development of the White Pages Youth Help and Information Page.

Representatives on the Management Committee believe that the partnerships are leading to a sustainable change in culture which will in turn lead to more effective advocacy on behalf of young people. While the pilot projects being established may, in some cases, only be short term, it is anticipated that the relationships established will have longer impact.

### **Achievements**

The Gold Coast Youth Commitment has improved linkages and general community awareness of the transition issues facing young people in the region, as well as having **piloted a number of transition strategies.**

Having obtained resources from the Queensland Government to appoint a transition broker working with Year 10 students in two secondary schools on the Gold Coast, further funding support from the Commonwealth has been used to appoint two further transition workers to provide early intervention in five other schools with students in Years 8 and, predominantly, Year 9 at risk of disengaging.

In addition, the Youth Commitment (in consultation with SCISCO) successfully applied to the Department of Family and Community Services in 2002 for a twelve month Innovative and Collaborative Youth Servicing (ICYS) pilot program. The funding agreement was formalized with SCISCO.

The first element of the ICYS pilot was a **seamless transition trial** which employed two staff from August 2002 to August 2003. The staff attended schools to run sessions with the students and were based at SCISCO's Broadbeach premises. Unlike transition brokers

they worked with young people still enrolled at school in this trial program. Their role was to deal with the issues that cause students to disengage, providing crisis management, case management, advocacy, referral and follow-up. Three schools and a TAFE Youth Program participated in the trial.

Students participating were identified by survey. The Seamless Transition project staff developed a range of resources to assist students at risk to develop and implement career plans. From August 2003, when the ICYS funding ceased, staff have continued to perform the transition support role as 'Youth Support Coordinators' under the Queensland Department of Education's ETRF process and are based at SCISCO.

A second element of the ICYS project was a trial of the **mentoring program Plan-It Youth**. In mid 2002, Merrimac State High School was approached by SCISCO to participate in the trial of the mentoring program. 16 students in Year 10 who were lacking direction or motivation were identified for the Plan-it Youth trial, and 13 completed the program. The trial took place in the last term of the 2002 school year finishing in November. Mentors met with their mentees only five times for a total of 10 hours. However, despite the short amount of contact, time positive and constructive relationships were established resulting in meaningful outcomes. A follow-up of these students during March 2004 indicated that the trial provided very positive outcomes.

The telephone information service and transition resources have also been established.

### **Impact on Services**

Many agencies providing youth services on the Gold Coast report that one of the major benefits has been the extent to which the Gold Coast Youth Commitment has facilitated collaboration and cooperation across the youth services sector. One of the main tools for this has been the formation of the "Community Reference Group." Introduced under the Youth Commitment, the purpose of this group is to exchange information, provide opportunities to develop partnerships and coordinate projects. The Group meets monthly and brings other agencies together on neutral ground. Youth support project staff report the community reference group as being one of the most valuable initiatives of the Youth Commitment. Community Reference Group members also note that representatives from schools are now more likely to attend and participate in meetings.

The Youth Commitment is also creating a platform for advocacy on behalf of young people. A Youth Forum, organised with a grant of \$3000 from the Gold Coast City Council, was held in August 2003 and attended by 61 young people as well as the Deputy Mayor and councilors, State MPs, School Principals, State Government Department senior representatives, and local youth service provider staff. Workshops were held on key themes for young people including discussion of issues related to learning, earning and living.

A Business Forum held in November 2003 and also funded by the City Council was designed to identify barriers and issues relating to youth employment, and to identify

innovative projects that partner business and youth. Eleven participants formed a Working Group under the Gold Coast Youth Committee management structure to progress this work.

The Queensland Government's education and training reforms under the ETRF is beginning to have a significant impact on the direction of trials and new programs. The Gold Coast Youth Commitment was instrumental in lobbying for the Gold Coast to be one of the original seven regions trialling the ETRF process; the State Conference on the ETRF commenced with a presentation by the Gold Coast Youth Commitment partnership. The ETRF requirement for Queensland regions to produce annual District Youth Achievement Plans is bringing together government departments and community groups to identify relevant initiatives for State government funding and the Youth Commitment is represented on the District Youth Achievement Plan Management Committees. This process should also help identify existing projects and other funding sources that could be accessed to support the initiatives identified under the plan for the Gold Coast.

### **The Approach**

The Gold Coast Youth Commitment has trialed a broad range of transition strategies for young people. There has been a strong focus on interventions for students before they reach the final years of schooling, as well as on providing public platforms for issues associated with learning and employment for young people to be discussed.

The Management Committee supported a model of community tendering for funds to trial initiatives (models) that were not in current practice, and engaging project staff to ensure efficiencies as well as effectiveness in the objective implementation and evaluation of pilot programs. While partners in projects and the broader community through Reference Group feedback were kept informed of progress and outcomes, and the Management Committee has a definite understanding of this being a non-service provider role, issues have arisen over the difference between service provision and trials.

One result of the experimentation with the trial of different models is that there are now a variety of transition support models operating on the Gold Coast. In addition to the Jobs Pathways Programme delivered by SCISCO, there are transition brokers in seven schools, but five of these schools are concentrating on supporting "at risk" students in Years 8 and 9 as an early intervention strategy. In addition, three youth support officers provide in-school and out-reach pre-transition assistance to students in seven schools, and Education Queensland provides a telephone follow-up service for all early school leavers.

The target for each model is different and efforts are being made to ensure that there is cooperation and seamless transition across the models when necessary. Identifying the best time for intervention should result in better long term outcomes and may impact upon policy directions for future service provision to students.

### **Challenges**

Apart from commissioning the environmental scan in the early stages of establishing the partnership, the Gold Coast Youth Commitment has had difficulty in compiling integrated data on outcomes that can provide a clear sense of progress. Despite a general perception that the transition broker model is 'making a difference', limited research capacity and local management arrangements combine to limit the availability of data. The three Youth Commitment transition brokers are managed by the individual schools in which they are located. The schools are more focused on qualitative rather than quantitative reporting.

Data is available on the progress of the referred students and is recorded and reported to schools and the Youth Commitment management. Measurable outcomes are generally evaluated at the end of reporting periods rather than during the course of case programs. Regular reports on progress are provided to the Youth Commitment Program Manager and school staff comment on individual students and their programs and needs. The general perception is backed up by personal comments by the students, teachers, Deputy Principals, employers, parents and are recorded. These projects have only been active for a relatively short time and need a longitudinal study to gather and evaluate data on outcomes.

While the Gold Coast Youth Commitment originally had a data management working group, this work has been overtaken by the ETRF process.

The ETRF process requires that an environmental scan is undertaken as part of the District Youth Achievement Plan development process. The Gold Coast Youth Commitment scan was made available to the DYAP for the Gold Coast North district and was updated for their purposes, and has again been reviewed for the Gold Coast South district DYAP. The DYAP is effectively managing this data collection and updating with support from the Youth Commitment. The Gold Coast Youth Commitment is on the management committees of local DYAPs and has access to all the data.

Through a combination of factors, there are now a series of transition support services now operating in the region and being accessed by schools. These include:

- Three pilot transition brokers based full-time in participating schools, integrated into the school system but auspiced by the Gold Coast Youth Commitment.
- JPP outreach visits based program (managed by SCISCO).
- three youth support staff (from the ICYS pilot) based part-time in schools and as outreach from SCISCO auspiced by Wesley Mission.
- Telephone follow-up and referral of early school leavers under Education Queensland's ETRF trial.

JPP covers the north and south ends of the Gold Coast LGA, transition brokers tend to cover the far north and southern part of the region, while the youth support staff and Education Queensland service the northern end of the region. These services are all supporting the transition of young people, but to date there is no way of comparing or

analyzing the relative impact that these initiatives are having. Hopefully the ETRF District Youth Achievement Plan process will enable this to be better managed and coordinated.

The Gold Coast Youth Commitment is an active member of the ETRF/DYAP management committees and working parties and is likely develop its role to promote the ETRF reform program and agenda and enhance the involvement of the community and business sectors across the Gold Coast.

There has been a lack of contact with DEST apart from the reporting requirements of the contract agreement. While the connections to the State Government are strengthening, the lack of a partnership with the Commonwealth is of concern given that most of the funding for the initiatives are provided through DEST. This lack of contact with the Department restricts exchange of information, and creates a sense of disconnection from wider policy directions. It also opens the possibility of government inadvertently creating local confusion by funding different agencies or groups to compete as facilitators of partnership.

## MAIN OUTCOMES

Queensland Department of Employment and Training (DET) funding provided in March 2003 was used to trial a transition broker working across two schools with students in Year 10 (at Robina High School 3 days a week and at Miami High School the other 2 days). These are high growth schools reporting apparent retention rates around 110%.

Students needing assistance are identified through a survey process presented by the Transition Officer and overseen by the school. The transition broker also tracks the destinations of students who leave school and offers to link them to local services such as SCISCO if necessary. (Queensland schools have been required to report on destinations annually since 2000, but the schools indicate that reporting is now more comprehensive as a result of the broker's involvement.)

The data reported by the transition broker in these schools demonstrates the change in student intentions between April 2003 and April 2004. The transition worker focused on supporting Year 10 students in each school who were surveyed as to their intention of completing Year 12.

**Table: 11 2003 Student at Risk of Non-Completions**

	<b>Miami HS</b>	<b>Robina HS</b>	<b>Total</b>
Year 10 Enrollment	188	400	588
Number surveyed	175	398	573
Identified by survey	<b>22</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>121</b>
Percentage at risk	13%	25%	21%
Separately referred by staff	27	16	43
Self-referred	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>

Total students at risk	54	122	176
Percentage of total students	29%	31%	30%

**Source: Gold Coast Youth Commitment, DET 12 Month Report 2004**

The transition worker assisted 176 students identified as ‘at risk’ of not completing Year 12. Services provided included interviews, development of career and learning plans, preparation of resumes, job searching and skills development, job application assistance, service provider visits, referrals and communication with parents.

Twelve months later at Robina High School 76 of the 122 students identified as ‘at risk’ (62%) had reconsidered their intention to not complete Year 12. At Miami High School, 34 out of 54 (63%) had reconsidered their intention to not complete Year 12.

Of the remaining 67 students (47 from Robina High and 20 from Miami High) the main outcomes recorded within 12 months were employment, alternate education at TAFE, and apprenticeships. 25 former students (14% of the original ‘at risk group’) could not be contacted.

**Table 12: Gold Coast - 2003 At Risk Student Outcomes**

	<b>Miami HS</b>	<b>Robina HS</b>	<b>Total</b>
Year 12	34	76	110
Employment	6	16	22
Alternate Education (TAFE)	5	5	10
Apprenticeships	2	6	8
Unemployed	1	0	1
Not contactable	8	17	25

**Source: Gold Coast Youth Commitment, DET 12 Month Report, 2004**

Of the uncontactable group, 6 had left school before the transition broker could make contact, 10 had ‘out of date’ contact information provided, and no information was available on the remaining former students.

Given the high levels of youth population mobility on the Gold Coast this is considered a good result.

### **Seamless Transition Trial**

The seamless education transition trial to address the needs of potential early school leavers was piloted in three high schools, and one alternative school. Centrelink, Job Network providers, youth agencies and training organizations were partners in the trial. The approach taken included an holistic career development program, production of a parent transition information pack, and a school system and assessment tool. A resource booklet *PLAN - Prospects 4 Life and Now* was conceived, developed and published. This booklet functions as a guide, resource and information ‘passport’.

After 875 students completed a survey based on indicators and issues influencing early school leaving decisions, 44 students from the four schools were invited to participate in the trial. 39 actually participated.

**Table 13: Seamless Transition Trial Participants Data 2003**

	<b>Year 10</b>	<b>Year 11</b>	<b>Total Students</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
TAFE Youth Access Program	NA	NA	6	4 still enrolled 1 traineeship, 1 unknown
Nerang State High School	6	6	12	All to Year 12
Aquinas College	12	0	12	All to Year 12
Southport State High School	4	5	9	7 to Year 12 1 alt education, 1 traineeship
Total	22	11	<b>39</b>	

Source: Innovative and Collaborative Youth Servicing Pilots Program, Final Report, Gold Coast Youth Commitment Inc, Nov 2003.

Of the participants, 31 have proceeded to Year 12 (79%), 5 continued enrolment in alternative education (13%), and 2 were in traineeships (5%). One student's outcome was unknown.

### **Mentoring**

Plan-It-Youth is an initiative supporting young people in transition between school and work, through mentoring. The mentors are volunteers who complete *Certificate One: Mentoring in the Community* and then commit two hours a week to the young person over a specified period.

In early 2002, Merrimac State High School was approached by SCISCO to participate in the trial of the mentoring program, and identified 16 students in Year 10 who were lacking direction or motivation of whom 13 completed the trial.

Volunteer mentors were recruited and 18 completed the training (delivered by Specialised Training Services) to act as mentors for the Merrimac students. Eighteen months later (March 2004), 10 students were either still at school or in full-time work, and another two were at TAFE or completing a traineeship. One student was job seeking. All reported that the program had been a positive experience for them, and they all reported that they now had goals concerning education, training or employment.

### **Case Study**

The Gold Coast Youth Commitment initially focused on supporting students leaving school early from Year 10. Various forms of transition support were available to these students in the region including JPP. When DEST funding became available to support further transition trials, the decision was taken to work with students in Years 8 and 9 across five schools, trying to re-engage students before they progressed to Year 10. Two transition workers would support students in five schools.

Since these students are not immediately preparing to leave school, the positions have been titled student development officers rather than transition brokers.

Julie Bromley, a Gold Coast Youth Commitment student development officer works at Beenleigh State High School two days a week, Windaroo Valley State High School, two days per week and Trinity Catholic College for one day per week.

She assists students in Years 8 and 9 to develop goals and career pathway plans that will enable them to make the transition from the Middle School to the Senior School. Many of these students are 'directionless' and some of these schools start transition planning from Year 8 onwards, believing that it is too late leaving it until Year 10.

At Beenleigh State High School, the Student Development Officer plays an integral role in an ETRF funded "Fresh Start Program", working with eleven boys in Year 9 considered to be at risk of leaving school early. She takes the boys as a group once a week delivering a Work Education Certificate I program. At other times she sees these boys and others, on a one to one basis. The first group is about to complete their course at the end of this term. Local youth services report that this strategy is making 'big inroads' into some of the main issues.

# MACARTHUR YOUTH COMMITMENT

## Macarthur, New South Wales

<b>Partnership Area:</b>	Campbelltown, Camden, and Wollondilly Local Government Areas
<b>Secondary Schools:</b>	35 government and non-government secondary schools
<b>Approximate Population:</b>	228,000

---

## Characteristics of Macarthur

The Macarthur Region is a growth corridor comprising three local government areas in south-west Sydney. The region has been characterised by:

- population growth at a higher rate than the average for both New South Wales and Australia
- having almost two thirds of the regional population concentrated in Campbelltown
- a very high growth rate for Camden accounting for the higher population growth rate for the Macarthur region compared to the state and national average
- a younger age profile of the region by comparison with the state and Australia as a whole, with a median age of 30 compared to 35 for NSW and Australia
- lower levels of post-school education attendance than the NSW and Sydney average, except for part-time TAFE enrolment.

In addition to the 35 secondary schools in the three LGAs, the South West Sydney Institute of TAFE has campuses within the Macarthur region including Campbelltown and provides programs particularly targeted at unemployed youth. Those students from the region who proceed to university predominantly attend the University of Western Sydney.

## Key Features of Macarthur Youth Commitment

- Introducing four transition brokers who have been working with students in eleven schools since term 4 2003, with these workers coordinated and supported by Centrelink under a Memorandum of Understanding with Macarthur Youth Commitment. The outcomes for students are being regularly reported through Centrelink to the Youth Commitment.
- Supporting youth mentoring programs in the region. Macarthur is one of six regional sites regions (including the Central Coast) that has been used by the NSW Department of Education and Training to implement the Plan-It-Youth mentoring program. In Macarthur, Plan-It-Youth has been introduced to 8 schools and approximately 100 mentors and students. Training courses and support for the mentors have been

provided through partnerships with South West Sydney Institute of TAFE, the NSW Department of Education and Training and the University of Western Sydney. At some Centrelink offices staff are participating as mentors and are encouraging some of their appropriate 'retiree' clients to also join as mentors. The Macarthur Youth Commitment has facilitated a mentoring working group since 2001 and provided resources to the mentors of various mentoring programs.

- Establishing a research and data analysis capability, and employing a research officer to manage this function. As well as reporting on transition outcomes, the Youth Commitment is able to undertake research projects such as a 2004 industry survey of 4000 businesses.
- Developing and producing a Macarthur Training and Employment Passport. In 2003, 2,500 were distributed through all schools, TAFE, job network, community and youth service providers. The 2004 revised version was launched in August with 7000 printed and distributed to services.
- Coordinating several forums and events bringing together staff from a wide variety of schools and services, which have resulted in improved networking and partnerships, and increased awareness of transition issues in the region.

## **Background**

Macarthur Youth Commitment was built on networks in the community developed from the Full Service Schools Program networks, other existing partnerships and an Interagency Forum held in August 2000. These led to the formation of a steering committee, supported by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum, in 2001 to develop the Macarthur Youth Commitment concept which was launched later that year. There was discussion on the wide coverage of the proposed Youth Commitment region, but agreement that the three LGAs had strong connections and a common desire to be included in the strategy.

The steering committee commissioned an environmental scan of the region from the University of Western Sydney, using the information to build a common understanding of the issues facing young people and the services supporting them in the region. The scan was updated in 2003.

The Macarthur Youth Commitment originally operated under the auspices of MACROC (Macarthur Regional Organisation of Councils) and in February 2002 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by a group of Macarthur stakeholders including:

- MACROC
- Centrelink
- South West Sydney Institute of TAFE
- Department of Education and Training
- The Premier's Department
- Department of Housing

- GROW Macarthur
- Macarthur Community Forum
- Dusseldorp Skills Forum
- Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEF).

Support from MACROC, the three local governments, the Premiers Department, along with the NSW Department of Education and Training and local schools, enabled the funding of an interim coordinator in 2002, who successfully garnered the basic resources for the Youth Commitment.

As with several other Youth Commitment projects, ECEF (now DEST) agreed to provide funding to meet coordination and some program costs from 2003 till 2005 at \$130,000 per annum.

Then, in 2003 the Macarthur Youth Commitment successfully applied to the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS) under the Sustainable Regions program. Funding announced by DOTARS was provided for specific aspects of the partnership:

- transition brokers to assist 1260 students;
- develop and distribute school to employment student passports to 35 schools; and
- provision of data and research services.

DOTARS provided \$904,000 for three years (2003-6) to support the Youth Commitment. Macarthur Youth Commitment was required to become an incorporated association to meet funding requirements, and was registered with the NSW Department of Fair Trading on 11 March 2003.

#### **Current Youth Commitment Management Committee**

- Kids of Macarthur Foundation
- South West Sydney Institute of TAFE
- Centrelink
- Campbelltown City Council
- Camden Council
- Sarah Redfern High School
- Uniting Care Burnside
- Premiers Department
- University Western Sydney
- Wollondilly Shire Council
- DET Campbelltown School Education Area Office

The South West Sydney Institute of TAFE in Campbelltown provides an office for the three administrative support staff for Macarthur Youth Commitment and other forms of infrastructure support. Financial management services have been provided by the Campbelltown City Council until mid 2004.

The Management Committee is using project focused working groups to develop new strategies and programs. Over the past few years there have been working parties

established on transition brokers; mentoring; employer links; youth participation; data management; marketing; and school exit procedures.

## **Achievements**

The main achievements of the Macarthur Youth Commitment since 2002 have been establishing the collaborative transition broker project with Centrelink in eleven schools, and the applied research projects which have included a revised environmental scan and reporting on student outcomes by transition brokers.

The transition broker program seeks to re-engage potential early school leavers with their school, or help provide a smooth transition to alternative education, training or employment through appropriate employers or service providers in their region. This is achieved by providing intensive assistance to the young person from community-based transition workers.

The resources available to Macarthur Youth Commitment for three years have allowed an extensive trial of the impact of transition brokers in almost one third of the secondary schools in the region. The model is also notable for closely involving Centrelink with schools in the transition process. Centrelink, involved from the outset in establishing the Macarthur Youth Commitment, was selected as an appropriate partner to manage the transition broker program due to their capacity to support the workers, prior involvement in the partnership, and understanding of the requirements of the broker role. The current transition brokers are Centrelink workers from the Youth and Students section who were provided with one month of up-front training on potential issues associated with working with the client group.

Centrelink funded the initial two month trial of one transition broker in 2002. From the final term of 2003 the transition program was expanded to three full-time and one part-time brokers working in eleven schools (including one Catholic and one special needs school). Macarthur Youth Commitment developed a Memorandum of Understanding with Centrelink on transition broker management operating from August 2003.

Brokers were allocated to schools by Macarthur Youth Commitment based on advice from the NSW Department of Education and Training and other stakeholders. The response from students has been very positive. Transition brokers are identified as being from outside of school, and are seen to have different skills, credibility and focus.

Macarthur has supported several mentoring programs for students at local schools including Plan-It-Youth and the Job Mates Indigenous Mentoring program. The Plan-It-Youth program is managed and resourced by the NSW Department of Education and Training.

A Student Passport resource first developed late in 2001 has since been reviewed and redeveloped, and is distributed annually on floppy disk and hard copy to all school, youth agencies, and Job Network providers. The passport contains a range of resources related

to transition from school, including action plans, jobseeker contact numbers, sample resume and job application guidelines and interview tips. 2,500 were distributed through agencies to young people in 2003; 7000 were printed in 2004 with over 4000 distributed within a month of the August launch.

JPP and Group Training Company staff report that the passport has had a 'big impact' on helping school leavers prepare for the workforce if 'delivered appropriately', providing students with the information that they need to prepare for employment.

Other achievements noted by those involved include increased numbers of referrals to community agencies such as Mission Australia, greater involvement of industry in work placement programs, and the development of TAFE outreach programs to support students in schools.

### **Impact on Services**

Although the Youth Commitment has been operating for only two or three years, there is already evidence of changed practices and approaches among a range of agencies involved.

The most notable of these is Centrelink. Centrelink in the Macarthur region was increasingly seeking to engage more productively with the local community and young people, and the Youth Commitment has provided a platform for the agency to interact with students and young people in an innovative and collaborative way. The Centrelink staff are now actively involved with supporting the transition broker and Plan-It-Youth mentoring initiatives, as well as their outreach workers visiting youth centres and schools to meet and help young people (rather than waiting for them to go to a Centrelink office). The Liaison manager – Education for Centrelink SW metropolitan region works from a car rather than a desk, and the philosophy adopted is that the Centrelink staff will bridge the gap with young people, rather than requiring young people to do this.

Some principals and regional administrators suggest that the Youth Commitment is also beginning to have an impact on the culture of local schools. Following on from the Full Service School Project, schools are developing greater awareness of the need to support the transition process and to improve the tracking of those who leave school

*“Schools are changing in the way they think about transition. One very positive aspect of the Youth Commitment has been the development of interagency work, with groups such as Centrelink assisting kids in schools and supporting them in the transition to work” (Manager, NSW DET District Office).*

One principal involved in the Youth Commitment noted an enormous change in the attitude of schools to linking with the community, including other government and non-government organisations, to support students whilst in school and when they leave. The Macarthur schools also appear more receptive to the introduction of a range of external

services into the school to assist students prepare for their transition to post-school destinations.

Whilst some believe that cultural change in schools will take a long time, many of those involved locally think that by making the schools much more open to partnerships, the cultures of these schools are already beginning to change. Schools are now welcoming youth agencies to work within their school. A manager of a local youth agency in the region believes that one effect of the Youth Commitment is to 'make schools more accountable for where their students go'.

Youth agencies are also being drawn closer to the school system. Community based organisations are now linking in with government programs and services in a way that did not occur several years ago. There are now five youth centres running programs in local schools – a ripple effect from the Youth Commitment partnerships. The youth centres are working closely with the transition brokers in many schools and as a result are linking to schools almost as an unintended consequence.

Various agencies report that access to the data on young people and their circumstances collected and distributed by the Youth Commitment has been useful to providers in a range of ways, including being used in re-tendering to government for projects. The data has helped build consistent cases for delivery of services.

Local governments have used the environmental scan data in their social planning processes, indicating an increased awareness of the importance of youth transition issues. The goals and objectives of the Youth Commitment have been adopted by some councils as a key strategy for meeting youth needs on the local government agenda. The Campbelltown Council's Youth Strategy (November 2002) identifies Macarthur Youth Commitment as a key strategy for achieving the priority area of education, skills and employment.

*'There is quite compelling evidence of a heightened community awareness of, and commitment to addressing, youth issues in this region. In particular, there is an enhanced understanding of the labour market and educational/training disadvantage that our young people experience relative to the state as a whole' (Research Officer, Macarthur Youth Commitment).*

## **The Approach**

The most fully resourced of the Youth Commitment sites, Macarthur Youth Commitment has been able to establish research and information infrastructure to support the partnership. Progress reporting on developments is regular and positively received, and support for the partnership structure is widespread.

The research function, funded under the Commonwealth's Sustainable Regions program, has enabled Macarthur to provide regular data reports that have created widespread agency support for the Youth Commitment. Despite the size of the region and agencies continuing to work in a competitive funding environment, the capacity of the Youth

Commitment to facilitate a wide range of partnerships is regarded by local agencies as possibly the most positive outcome of this approach.

The Management Committee has tended to use action focused project groups, and is increasingly conducting local forums based on information gained through partnerships and research to raise awareness and maintain momentum.

The approach has also been based on strong government involvement at Commonwealth, state and local levels. There have been several whole of government briefing meetings involving DEST, DOTARS, DEWR, FACS, Centerlink, Premiers Dept and council staff being updated on MYC and discussing how to support the Youth Commitment. The original MOU establishing the Youth Commitment was dominated by government agencies, and since then financial support for various initiatives has been provided by the three local governments, Premiers Department, Department of Housing, the NSW Department of Education and Training, Department of Community Services as well as several local schools. The mentoring program (Plan-It-Youth) is coordinated under funding provided by the NSW Department of Education and Training

### **Challenges**

New South Wales state high schools employ full-time careers advisers in schools, some of whom have taken time to be convinced that the role of transition brokers in the school does not threaten the careers function. While the introduction of transition brokers has not led to industrial issues in Macarthur, in several schools the transition brokers have struggled for acceptance, and the processes by which student referrals are managed have taken time to become established.

Despite principals reporting that other schools in the region without access to transition brokers were actively seeking to have their schools involved, some careers advisers in government schools appear to be threatened by the new role. These concerns have in some cases been relieved once the transition broker has been operating for some time in the school. These tensions do, however, have the potential to undermine the potential of broker support for young people at risk of early school leaving.

A further challenge is the capacity of the TAFE system to meet the needs of early school leavers in the region. Data across Youth Commitment projects indicates that TAFE Institutes provide the most important alternative option for those young people who leave school early. Transition brokers in schools have been linked to TAFE Institute equity brokers who are involved in alternative learning outreach programs.

Despite the responsiveness of the South West Sydney Institute of TAFE in providing \$2.8m worth of programs for unemployed youth, TAFE Institute staff meeting with the transition brokers to obtain information on the needs of young people, and programming extra 'youth at risk' courses, pressures for sufficient places remain. Despite the support of the TAFE Institute for the Youth Commitment approach, younger people who have left school early often challenge TAFE staff and teaching approaches which are oriented to

self-paced and adult learning approaches. Access to sufficient funding and places in TAFE to accommodate the numbers of young people requiring assistance is a continuing challenge.

Some of the demand for other pathways from early school leavers is being taken up by the local group training company, Macarthur Group Companies, which has been very supportive in providing local training for young people, and developed strong partnerships with TAFE and the Australian Industry Group for the MARS (Macarthur Apprenticeship Recruitment Strategy) project that resulted in 20 apprentices being employed in 2003.

The Youth Commitment is beginning to turn attention to the gap in services for 13 and 14 year olds at school, and the emerging need for alternative education opportunities. While transition brokers, tracking and mentoring are proving successful strategies for young people leaving school, there is a developing awareness of a need to focus on interventions in the earlier years of schooling, providing more support to keep students engaged in learning.

## MAIN OUTCOMES

**Macarthur Youth Commitment** is able to report on outcomes for significant numbers of young people as a result of the appointment of three full-time and one part-time transition brokers active in Macarthur schools since Term 4 2003. The four transition brokers operate in eleven schools, one of which is a special needs school.

The transition brokers, managed by Centrelink, have been reporting data through the Timepoint software system since February 2004. During 2004 the clients and students referred by schools have continued to increase to number 446 young people by September. 63% of clients are still at school.

**Table 14: Participant outcomes, September 2004**

<i>Outcome type</i>	<i>Appr/ trainee</i>	<i>F/T empl</i>	<i>P/T empl</i>	<i>F/T school</i>	<i>P/T school</i>	<i>F/T uni</i>	<i>P/T uni</i>	<i>F/T TAFE</i>	<i>P/T TAFE</i>	<i>Job Seeking</i>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>72</b>

Note that the total number of outcomes does not directly equate to the number of clients as some clients will be recorded with multiple outcomes.

74 of the 446 clients (17%) are not at school and not employed, although a small proportion of them would be in full-time education or training.

The transition brokers at the eleven schools in Macarthur depend on school staff for their referrals. In many cases, those students are identified for referral on the basis that the young person would be better served pursuing options other than school rather than staying on but not achieving. As a result, these transition workers expect that their work may result in small future impacts in retention, but significant impacts on achieving positive post-school destinations.

**Table 15: Clients by Age**

Age	Apr '04		May '04		Jun '04		Jul '04		Aug '04		Sep '04	
	No.	%										
<15	14	5.6	13	4.9	15	4.7	22	5.7	19	4.7	22	4.9
15	69	27.0	64	23.9	73	22.7	88	23.0	99	24.6	102	22.9
16	117	45.7	126	47.0	158	49.2	171	44.6	171	42.5	188	42.2
17	48	18.7	55	20.6	61	19.0	85	22.2	86	21.4	109	24.4
>17	8	3.1	10	3.7	14	4.4	17	4.4	27	6.7	25	5.6
Unspec.												
<b>Total</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>383</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>446</b>	<b>100.0</b>

\* Excludes 'unspecified'

**Table 16: Clients by Employment Status**

School status and employment status	Apr '04		May '04		Jun '04		Jul '04		Aug '04		Sep '04	
	No.	%										
At school and												
-employed full time	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
-employed part time	15	5.9	7	2.6	7	2.1	26	6.8	34	8.5	45	10.1
-apprentice/trainee	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
-not employed	128	50.0	141	52.6	180	56.1	195	50.9	200	49.8	236	52.9
Total at school	143	55.9	148	55.2	187	58.3	221	57.7	234	58.2	281	63.0
Not at school and												
-employed full time	19	7.4	22	8.2	25	7.8	31	8.1	33	8.2	33	7.4
-employed part time	16	6.3	10	3.7	19	5.9	15	3.9	17	4.2	21	4.7
-apprentice/trainee	18	7.0	24	9.0	24	7.5	31	8.1	33	8.2	37	8.3
-not employed	60	23.4	64	23.9	66	20.6	85	22.2	85	21.1	74	16.6
Total not at school	113	44.1	120	44.8	134	41.7	162	42.3	168	41.8	165	37.0
Unspecified												
<b>All clients</b>												
-employed full time	19	7.4	22	8.2	25	7.8	31	8.1	33	8.2	33	7.4
-employed part time	31	12.1	17	6.3	26	8.1	41	10.7	51	12.7	66	14.8
-apprentice/trainee	18	7.0	24	9.0	24	7.5	31	8.1	33	8.2	37	8.3
-not employed	188	73.4	205	76.5	246	76.6	280	73.1	285	70.9	310	69.5
<b>Total all clients</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>383</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>446</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Examples of the kind of work being undertaken by the transition brokers are documented in the following case study.

### **Ken's Case Study:**

#### **23 March 2004 – initial contact**

Ken has left school and is currently enrolled in a pre-apprenticeship 'Get Skills' course at a local TAFE college. He requested some help and advice as to what to do once he has finished the course on 14 May. We spoke about the importance of him doing well in the course, and we are going to start planning on what he should do after that.

#### **3 May 2004 – monitoring visit**

Met with Ken at Centrelink – his course is going to end within the next week. We looked at a few jobs that he might apply for, and I advised him on how he should apply for them. He is coming back to see me tomorrow so we can finalise the applications and send them off.

#### **6 May 2004 – general visit**

Met with Ken and looked at a few jobs on the internet, which we then applied for. I showed him how to do a resume and covering letter and fax cover sheet. Also organized an interview for him with an employer at Silverwater and used the Youth Commitment employment passport to help him with questions and responses in the interview. He felt a bit more comfortable once he read some of the questions.

#### **7 May 2004 – phone call**

His mother called me to advise that Ken could not attend the job interview today. Requested her to tell him to come and see me next week and to also make new arrangements with the employer.

#### **17 May 2004 – general visit**

Met with Ken. He had gone to the rescheduled interview, and they appeared to be interested in him, but wanted to see his TAFE results before offering him the job. He then said he was following up with his TAFE teacher to speed up the process. He also said he liked the workplace and was impressed by some of the things they did there.

#### **1 June 2004 – phone call follow up**

Rang Ken. He confirmed that he had started the job at Silverwater and is quite happy there.

# NORTHERN SUNSHINE COAST YOUTH COMMITMENT

## Northern Sunshine Coast, Queensland

<b>Partnership Area:</b>	Noosa Shire Local Government Area, and northern area of Maroochy Shire
<b>Secondary Schools:</b>	5 government and non government secondary schools
<b>Approximate Population:</b>	45,000

---

## Characteristics of the Northern Sunshine Coast

The Northern Sunshine Coast is situated north of Brisbane and is based in Noosa Shire and the northern fringe of Maroochy Shire. Characteristics of the

- a growth rate (21%) over twice that of the Queensland average
- a significant proportion of the population residing in rural areas
- a high unemployment rate
- a high level of socio-economic disadvantage with a significant proportion of the population living below the poverty line
- high proportion of single parent families
- a highly transient population

Education provision on the Northern Sunshine Coast is rapidly growing with five state high schools (three of which offer classes to Year 10 level) and one non-government high school.

The Cooloola Sunshine Institute of TAFE (CSIT) provides courses throughout the wider Sunshine Coast region, although most students in the area travel to Gympie, Nambour and Maroochy to study and attend lectures.

The University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) is the closest University situated in Sippy Downs at the southern end of the Sunshine Coast. Central Queensland University (CQU) also offers undergraduate and postgraduate courses on the Sunshine Coast.

## Key Features of Northern Sunshine Coast Youth Commitment Partnership

- developing a process of common data collection of young peoples' career intentions through a collaboration with five schools and Centrelink to collect, analyse and publish data. The data includes career aspirations of students in Year 8 to 12 and has identified that students are potentially very interested in creative industries, which has in turn engaged the interest and planning of government and providers in the area.

- implementing a modified Plan-It-Youth mentoring project which has been funded to provide assistance to more than 300 young people over the next 2 years as a result of funding of \$125,000 provided to the local Youth Service under the Mentor Marketplace Program. The mentoring program has been modified to meet the needs of young people aged between 15 and 19 who have already disengaged from school without a clear training or career pathway.
- developing transition resources for young people in three areas: providing one to one support, providing career education in a community context, and ensuring information flow in the community.
- establishing the nationally incorporated “Lead On” project on the Northern Sunshine Coast in partnership with the Bendigo Bank in May 2004. The program links young people to appropriate businesses to create and maintain a project such as newsletter insert, running a community ball, or developing websites. It is a basis for getting young people to undertake business or community projects. The Youth Commitment is negotiating with local businesses regarding potential sponsorship and expertise.

## **Background**

The Youth Commitment Partnership is founded on a highly integrated Noosa Youth Service based at Noosa Heads. Prior to the Youth Commitment youth services in the area were already highly integrated and operated on a strategic basis. Noosa Youth Service was the only dedicated youth service in the area, bringing together health, housing, counseling and support services for young people.

The relatively contained size of the community on the northern Sunshine Coast and the comparatively small number of service providers has enabled strong relationships to be built through the Youth Commitment process. The partnership was built on an existing strong relationship between the Noosa Youth Service and the six local schools.

Those involved in establishing the Youth Commitment were clear that they would not be a provider of services, but a facilitator of partnerships supported by research and information. The Youth Commitment Partnership has no office or physical location, with administrative support staff based at home.

Following initial contact with the Manager of Noosa Youth Service, and the convening of a community forum, key agencies quickly moved to establish a Memorandum of Understanding to implement a Youth Commitment MOU were:

- Noosa Shire Council
- Noosa Youth Service
- Centrelink
- Sunshine Coast Area Consultative Committee (SCACC)
- Noosa District State High School
- Coolum Beach State High School
- Cooroora Secondary College

- Sunshine Beach State High School
- Department of Families
- Cooloola Sunshine Institute of TAFE (CSIT)
- CADET – Jobs Pathway Program
- Department of Employment and Training (DET)
- Dusseldorp Skills Forum
- Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEP)

An Environmental Scan was commissioned in 2001 and updated again in 2003 using the most recent census data. The second environmental scan was able to provide succinct and very useful data on the issues, learning and work needs of young people in the region. This work provided a sound foundation for the Youth Commitment management committee to establish the strategic plan for the next few years.

The Youth Commitment Partnership has obtained funding support from three levels of government to trial initiatives that support young people. In addition to three years of funding from DEST (\$225,000 from 2002-2005), the Queensland Department of Employment and Training provided an additional \$90,000 for mentoring and non-recurrent costs.

The Department of Families and Communities, Noosa Shire Council, and Queensland Health have also provided funding in the past twelve months. The transition resource initiatives known as ‘TRY’ are being developed through the support of Queensland Health (\$10,000), the Department of Employment and Training (\$30,000) and Noosa Youth Services (\$10,000).

In kind contributions have been provided by the NRMA, Cooloola Sunshine TAFE, Noosa Youth Service, Coolool Beach Surf Club, Noosa Council, Visible Image, Centrelink, three local High Schools, Sunshine Beach Surf Club, Queensland Health and Noosa Bowls Club.

### **Achievements**

The Northern Sunshine Coast has concentrated on adapting the Plan-It-Youth mentoring program to also meet the needs of young people who have already disengaged from school, achieving successful outcomes both for school students and for young people who had left before completing secondary school.

A highly collaborative approach to improving transition support has also developed between the local Centrelink Office, high schools, CADET (the local JPP provider) and Queensland Health. Meetings regularly convened by the Manager of Centrelink have exchanged information, ideas, and supported the development of resources to inform school staff, students and their families on options, assistance and career pathways. This collaborative approach has supported the development of the TRY initiative; Transition Resources for Youth.

The Youth Commitment has invested in research, collecting information over several years on the careers intentions of students from Year 10 onwards across the five local High Schools. This information has proved to be influential on the thinking and forward planning of a range of local agencies as well as local government.

Data from the “Snapshot 2004” produced by the Youth Commitment is being used by the Council’s Economic Development Officer and is also being fed through to the university and schools’ proposed curriculum development plans. The Snapshot was reported by a local government councillor to be a ‘powerful piece of work’ identifying the need for more ‘creative industries’ in the area. The university is now getting involved in the partnership, building a new faculty which will be based around creative enterprises.

### **Impact on Services**

Northern Sunshine Coast High Schools, Centrelink Office and Local Government have all found the information, tools, and partnerships made available through the Youth Commitment to have had a strong influence on their operation.

The principals of the State High Schools work together in a way that *“is very unusual and quite powerful”*...according to a relatively recently appointed principal. There is a sense that the school is very much a part of the community, and schools are prepared to trial and pilot programs on behalf of other schools in the area. Competition has reduced as school management is increasingly prepared to learn from each other. Reduced numbers of school exclusions are being reported. *Our school hasn’t done one (an exclusion) in a long time. (High School Principal).*

Schools are changing the way they provide careers advice, introducing careers content into the teaching curriculum and class time, and making different staffing arrangements. The schools have all introduced common exit surveys for school leavers.

*Schools that were previously competitive are now sharing in areas such as curriculum. There is learning amongst the professionals of how to work more professionally with at risk and disengaged young people and in the transition process. There is an increased professionalism across the board in dealing with these young people. (Local Government Councillor).*

There is also a developing momentum for introducing more flexible learning arrangements. Examples are the introduction off-campus literacy and learning programs, new enterprise education programs, and supported work experience. A new initiative is the proposed Tranzed program organized as a joint venture between Noosa High School and Noosa Youth Service. Young people who have been officially disengaged from education for at least six months will be provided with learning environments at Noosa Youth Service to enable them to commence studies toward their Year 10 education. Education Queensland has employed a teacher to work off campus with 24 of these students.

*I've seen significant changes in a short period of time. Schools are tracking where their kids have gone and are keeping an eye on them. The mentoring program is producing significant outcomes. The local public debate has been focused around young people, and has given a real profile to youth initiated projects. Broad networks have been formed and the schools' use of language is changing. (TAFE officer)*

JPP reports that the local schools are now much more effective in directing appropriate students to the JPP service, and the roles of all parties appear to be much clearer.

This is partially the result of the strong involvement of Centrelink in the Youth Commitment transition project. The Manager of the Centrelink Office indicates that staff attitudes to 'at risk' students has changed, with greater awareness of the other services and pathways that are available, and a preparedness to use those agencies as referral points. Centrelink is also involved in the Partnership's working groups. *School staff are starting to know our staff and recognize them. We used to be a closed shop, but now we have a strong relationship with the agencies that support kids who leave school. (Centrelink Manager)*

The Centrelink Office is prepared to share relevant data, and convenes a monthly transition meeting at their offices, attended by representatives from local schools, JPP, Queensland Health, and the Youth Commitment Partnership staff. These meetings have been held for the past two years and are used to plan data collection, careers information, and share ideas to improve services. This proactive approach is allowing Centrelink to share resources and knowledge with the community.

One member of the Youth Commitment Board reports that the vision and goals of the Youth Commitment partnership has enabled other areas of government to interact with the education and training sector. Queensland Health is reported to regard this partnership as a best practice approach, and has had some impact on the roll out of some of their own programs.

## **The Approach**

The approach of the Northern Sunshine Coast partnership was based in ensuring that the local strategic decision-makers were on board and involved from the formation of the project, an approach assisted by the size of the local region.

They also placed a strong emphasis on the collection and use of data, and the impact that this is having on local agencies has so far justified their approach. Two environmental scans have been conducted, and more targeted forms of information gathering have been completed each year. The second environmental scan produced focused and very useful strategic information, and the careers intentions surveys have also proved influential.

The other key approaches taken have been the introduction of mentoring and the development of resources to support the transition process. The mentoring approach has been particularly interesting in that the school-based Plan-It-Youth model has been

adapted to also meet the needs of young people who are no longer attending school. In 2004, the program is being coordinated by Noosa Youth Service in four local high schools, with the eight weeks of training being provided by Cooloola Sunshine Institute of TAFE.

Transition brokering was briefly used in a trial on the Northern Sunshine Coast, but the strategic decision was taken that this approach would only be introduced once partners were confident that the program was sustainable beyond a pilot phase. Without having secured sustainable funding, the management committee decided not to proceed with transition brokers in schools.

Instead, the strategy of this Youth Commitment site was to develop improved knowledge and understanding of career pathways and options by developing transition resources for young people. The formation of a transitions working group led to the formation of a strategy to improve transition support, which was primarily based on interviewing young people regarding their transition experience, as well as mapping referral flows between agencies, and assessing the impact of information provided by service agencies and parents. As a result of the information gathered, the transitions working group has developed an approach based around providing one to one support, improved career education and developing a community information campaign.

## **Challenges**

The high rates of population mobility pose a real challenge for the Youth Commitment in this region. Initial attempts to track students were ambitious, with every student in schools being assigned with a number to identify their path through the education and training system. A year later, it was found that a 30% turnover in school enrollments made it impracticable to continue the tracking project, a turnover rate that continues to be reported by local schools.

The concept of community accountability is still very embryonic (as it is across most Youth Commitment sites). While there is a strong level of enthusiasm for partnerships and the potential they provide, there is no substantial indication that there is a collective concept of responsibility for outcomes, and reporting is primarily based on programs rather than across sectors and systems.

Having anticipated the introduction of Education Queensland's ETRF and the associated development of district Youth Achievement Plans, the Youth Commitment is in the process of identifying and adjusting their role within this wider State Government framework. The Youth Commitment Partnership forms one of three sub-regions of the Education Queensland Nambour District. As some on the Youth Commitment management committee point out, Education Queensland sought the advice of the Northern Sunshine Coast on how best to implement the ETRF trials and the Youth Achievement Plans, but then left the region out of initial trials and provided no funding while supporting other regions up and down the Queensland coast to produce the plans.

*What's happened with the Youth Commitment partnership is exactly what Education Queensland has in mind for the ETRF approach. (Senior Manager, Department of Employment and Training).*

The tendency for existing partnerships to be ignored or not funded as state governments roll out their version of partnerships reflects a broader challenge – of finding ways to encourage government to access local knowledge and experience. Despite the experimentation with community partnerships, governments remain locked in to a centrally driven policy approach while starting to use partnerships to achieve their own agendas. Processes to capture the ideas that emerge from these local arrangements are required, and while these processes are required within government, the policy feedback loop required may need to be collaboratively developed through the impetus of local partnerships.

To support advocacy and research to achieve this, the Youth Commitment partnerships require ongoing strategic alliances with each other and with agencies such as the Dusseldorp Skills Forum.

## **MAIN OUTCOMES**

*The best outcome is the genuine partnership that has emerged. Those who worked with young people in isolation are now talking and combining for action. Its powerful stuff. (Noosa Shire Councillor)*

The Northern Sunshine Coast piloted a mentoring program based on the Plan-It-Youth mentoring model to meet the needs of young people in the Coolool area during 2003.

Funded by the Department of Employment and Training, this intervention was designed to support young people investigate opportunities and options prior to making decisions to leave school rather than a strategy for keeping them in school. The aim of this pilot was to provide a mentor who could assist young people at risk of leaving school early or those that had recently left school without securing a job or engagement in further training, to explore all possible options in further education, training and employment

In the mentoring pilot – two groups of young people were selected:

- 1 Young people in Year 10 and Year 11, between the ages of 15 and 19; and
2. Young people between 15 and 19 who have already disengaged from school without a clear training or career pathway.

Modifications to the Plan-It-Youth program were necessary for the requirements of those young people who had already disengaged from school. Many of the young people disengaged from school are living independently, have become dislocated from families

and consequently struggle with a range of 'survival' type issues. These social issues needed to be addressed prior to in depth discussion of career and job pathways.

The program reference group supported the coordinator by providing ongoing advice and guidance as well as acting as a reporting mechanism to the Northern Sunshine Coast Youth Commitment. The reference group was made up of representatives from Cooloola Sunshine Institute of TAFE, the Department of Employment and Training, Noosa Youth Service, CADET and Coolum Beach State High School.

Mentors were recruited from the volunteer program at Noosa Youth Service and 18 people completed the mentor-training program over a period of 8 weeks prior to their involvement with students. The local TAFE Institute delivered the mentor training over 8 weeks in 3 hour sessions.

Young people were identified as potential participants by Coolum State High School (CSHS) and Noosa Youth Service programs. Once matched with their mentors they were encouraged to meet either at Coolum High School on a weekly basis or in other suitable community settings.

Seventeen young people were linked to a mentor.

- Eight young people who were seriously at risk of leaving school, and with no future plans for further education or employment, have, through the mentoring sessions, chosen to remain at school.
- One young person received a Retail Traineeship.
- Two 'out-of-school' young people acquired full time work (40 hours per week).
- Two young people, who had left school, realized that they were barely able to fill out forms and enrolled in a Noosa Youth Service Numeracy and Literacy Program. One of these young people has since found full time work with a Tiling Outlet.
- One young person, who left school during 2003, has enrolled in a TAFE Interior Design course.
- One young person was able to obtain work experience in a Pharmacy due to the support from her mentor and was subsequently offered part time work
- Two young people moved away to a different community for personal reasons and the outcomes are 'unknown'.

Mentors and the young people strongly endorsed the programme, and the relationships have been maintained well beyond the completion of the formal program.

The mentoring program provided young people with more knowledge about their prospective career paths, and what they need to do to attain that career. They were far more confident about their ability to achieve their goals. Additionally, the more positive perceptions they have of themselves after completion of the strategy can also be attributed to the programme.

## **Case Study**

### **Jane and Beatrice<sup>1</sup>**

Aged 17, not living at home and needing some adult guidance Beatrice found herself volunteering for the mentor program run through her local High School. Her friends were all doing it and it seemed like a great opportunity to miss some school and go and hang out. Five months down the track Beatrice thinks that the mentoring program, and her friendship with Jane has changed her life.

Jane is a 46 year-old experienced hairdresser. Jane frequently gave young people a start in hairdressing through apprenticeships and part time work in her salon. Jane thought the concept of mentoring was an excellent idea, and as she had previous experience in this role she volunteered for the program. Both were surprised at how well they connected.

Jane and Beatrice learned a lot from each other through sharing experiences honestly and openly. They worked through some goal setting strategies and attended a Careers Expo. From this Beatrice was able to identify that she really wanted to be an interior decorator. The idea of studying appealed to Beatrice and she enrolled in an Interior Design course at TAFE. Beatrice is also seeking a school-based traineeship to further her opportunities in this field.

Beatrice and Jane enjoyed going for coffee, the movies, shopping and generally hanging out having a chat. Jane felt the workbook and training provided were good supports for the mentors and provided some structure for their interactions.

There is no doubt that the friendship between Jane and Beatrice has been of mutual benefit. Both agree that this connection has been the most important thing to come out of the mentoring program and will continue to flourish.

---

<sup>1</sup> Names changed to respect confidentiality

## TUMUT YOUTH COMMITMENT

### Tumut, New South Wales

<b>Partnership Area:</b>	Tumut Shire Local Government Area
<b>Secondary Schools:</b>	3 secondary schools (1 High School, 2 Central Schools)
<b>Approximate Population:</b>	11,000

---

### Characteristics of Tumut

Tumut is located in a rural setting at the base of the Snowy Mountains half way between Melbourne and Sydney. The Shire has five major townships and a population of approximately 11,000. The region has been characterised as:

- a comparatively older community with a mean age of 35 years.
- no anticipated growth in population.
- a community with very few people born overseas.
- having approximately 750 young people aged between 15 and 19.

Secondary schooling is provided through three schools comprising one High School and two Central Schools (a Government and a Catholic school that provide secondary education to Year 10). The High School in Tumut has an enrolment of 520 students.

The Riverina Institute of TAFE also has a campus in Tumut.

### Key Features of Tumut Youth Commitment

- introducing a transition broker at Tumut High School working with young people two days a week for the past 18 months. The broker is currently working with 18 students, and has assisted 35 students overall.
- supporting a Year 11 Workstudies Program at Tumut High School which enables students to participate in the workplace 1 day a week. The program is based in the classroom but leads to employment outcomes. 25 students enrolled are enrolled in the program.
- organising a one day workshop program called “Girl Savvy” targeted at students in Years 9 and 10. The workshop encourages young women to become financially responsible and develop financial management skills. The workshop, planned towards the end of the school year, uses community mentors for the students and is being coordinated by the transition broker at Tumut High School.

### Background

As with most Youth Commitment projects, the idea was first discussed at a Community Forum initiated by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum (DSF) and the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEP) in November 2000 to determine whether there was interest in establishing a youth commitment partnership. The initial meeting was attended by approximately 50 people and led to the formation of a Steering Committee.

Local Government was strongly involved at the outset, as well as the local schools. While industry was represented at the initial forum and employers such as the local VISY plant were supportive, business was not involved in the committee or in the planning processes.

The Tumut Commitment was formalized by an MOU which was signed by:

- Tumut Shire Council
- Centrelink
- Riverina Community College
- Employment National
- Mission Employment
- Tumut High School
- Batlow Central School
- Mcauley Catholic Central School
- Valmar Support Services
- Riverina Institute of TAFE (Tumut Campus).

The first initiative was to commission an environmental scan to profile the learning and work situation of young people in the Shire. In February 2002 the environmental scan was completed and the results were presented at a meeting of community members.

The Shire CEO reports that the environmental scan raised the profile of youth issues in the local community and led to council setting up a 'Youth Matters' committee. This committee was trying to focus on the needs of young people before they got to high school, and was a direct result of the process of the environmental scan.

To support the Youth Commitment, DEST provided \$10,000 per year for 3 years which was matched by \$10,000 from the Blakeney Millar Foundation. Blakeney Millar is a local philanthropic foundation which accesses a set amount of funding annually to assist worthy projects in Tumut. Blakeney Millar Foundation agreed to match the DEST funding of \$10,000 per annum over the three year period.

The Committee of Management decided to invest the available \$20,000 in transition brokerage. The Committee investigated the possible implementation of the Plan-It-Youth mentoring program for at risk students, but due to the costs involved, was unable to find further funding support for the mentoring program to proceed at this stage.

The Tumut Youth Commitment project is now auspiced by VALMAR Support Services and the management committee role has been taken over by the VALMAR Board.

VALMAR Support Services is based in Tumut. Primarily a disability support service, the agency has now expanded its scope to include working with students at risk as a result of their involvement in the Youth Commitment.

VALMAR was originally a partner on the Committee of Management. In attempting to access corporate funding support, the Youth Commitment has transferred management arrangements under the umbrella of VALMAR in order to take advantage of their deductible gift recipient status.

The Pratt Foundation (the charitable arm of VISY) is also now offering the Youth Commitment \$20,000 p.a. for two years if a further contribution of \$60,000 (for 2 years) can be obtained from other sources.

Since the 1990's Valmar has operated two "Business Services" for the disabled in Grounds Maintenance and in Timber Value Adding. Together these Business Services provide employment for 45 adults with disabilities at any point in time. Other services provided include Respite, Community Access, Post School Options, Residential Support, Open Employment, Attendant Care and more recently HACC services for the frail aged such as Meals on Wheels and Home Maintenance and Modifications.

Currently Valmar employs 150 people, supports over 220 service recipients, and has offices in Tumut and Yass.

### **Achievements**

More students at Tumut High in Year 10 are reportedly now continuing on to Year 11 and 12. Three years ago approximately 80% of Year 10 students were remaining for Years 11 and 12, but now that figure has increased to 92% of Year 10 students.

The Youth Commitment has put the issue of young people on the local agenda, and raised youth transitions as an important issue for the local interagency group. Establishing a transition broker position and securing agreement to track all current students in Year 9 through their subsequent school and TAFE pathways will provide key information for further planning.

The Tumut High School Workstudies program has proved to be a most successful initiative achieving employment outcomes. Students attend work one day a week with a business of their choice. During this two year program students learn generic work practices in the classroom and put these into practice while on placement.

Within VALMAR Support Services, the Youth Commitment is now exploring the possibility of expanding the approach to surrounding towns such as Gundagai, Adelong, Batlow, Yass, Talbingo and Brungle.

### **Impact on Services**

VALMAR Support Services is a good example of an organization that previously had no involvement with disengaged young people and schools, but now has become part of the support services for young people. VALMAR now has a formal working relationship with the schools both for disability services and potential early school leavers.

### **The Approach**

Tumut is the smallest of the Youth Commitment partnership sites and has, until now, had fewer resources at its disposal to implement initiatives that will assist young people at risk.

With limited resources, those involved have concentrated on implementing the transition broker strategy, and the outcomes achieved appear to be providing great encouragement for those involved locally. The transition broker works in the High School for two days each week and this individual also coordinates school vocational education on the other three days.

The Youth Commitment has also has a focus on developing leadership and entrepreneurial skills in young people through arranging training camps, forums and workshops.

Limited resources available from government resulted in the Youth Commitment concentrating on obtaining businesses and local philanthropic groups such as the Pratt Foundation and Blakeney Millar to fund and support the Youth Commitment.

### **Challenges**

The Tumut Youth Commitment is currently very focused on the local school system. The limited resources accessed by the Commitment partnership have to this point confined activity to implementing transition brokerage. A number of unsuccessful submissions to government for funding support have led those involved to turn to philanthropic groups, and this may now provide the opportunity to broaden the range of strategies.

Local government, while a strong supporter of the Youth Commitment, now appear less involved than at the outset and maintaining a broad coalition of support will be a challenge now that Youth Commitment is being auspiced by VALMAR.

Reporting of data on outcomes has not been a feature of this partnership, despite the small numbers of young people involved and the size of the community. The transition broker is not using the Timepoint software that might have otherwise assisted reporting.

### **MAIN OUTCOMES**

The support provided by the part-time transition broker at Tumut High School is a positive impact both on school retention and knowledge of student destinations. A higher

percentage of Year 10 students are returning to enroll in Years 11 and 12 due to the combined effects of brokerage, Workstudies program and VET offerings.

The 35 students who have been assisted by the transition broker over an 18 month period have all achieved positive outcomes. All have achieved either full-time employment or remained in the school to complete Year 12, or the vocational equivalent through TAFE.

The Principal of Tumut High School is very positive about the outcomes of the transition brokerage.

## WHITTLESEA CASE STUDY

### Whittlesea, Victoria

<b>Partnership Area:</b>	City of Whittlesea Local Government Area
<b>Secondary Schools:</b>	10 secondary schools (7 government, 2 private, 1 catholic)
<b>Approximate Population:</b>	115,000

---

### Characteristics of Whittlesea

Whittlesea is located on the outer northern suburbs of Melbourne and is a high growth area. In the late 1990s, the City of Whittlesea had a low school retention and high unemployment rate compared to other regions of Melbourne. Key characteristics of the City of Whittlesea are:

- 70% of the area is rural or non-urban
- a high level of ethnic diversity
- rapid increases in population density in the northern part of the City
- a youthful population with almost 30% aged under 18 years
- a much higher percentage of unskilled workers than the average across Melbourne

There are two major education and training providers in Whittlesea. RMIT University has two campuses within the City and the Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE also has a campus at Epping.

### Key Features of the Whittlesea Youth Commitment

- three transition brokers jointly funded by seven secondary schools have provided case management to over 2000 early school leavers in those schools. These brokers are identified by local young disengaged and high risk students in surveys as making a big difference to young people
- commitments from government secondary colleges to improve student exit procedures and to track the progress of early school leavers to provide ongoing support
- involvement of key agencies in the City of Whittlesea in a Community Team which meets regularly to community case manage young people
- an action research capacity base on data collected by transition brokers and the Community Team linked to support provided through RMIT and the local Area Consultative Committee.

## **Background**

The Whittlesea Youth Commitment has evolved over five years.

Whittlesea now operates as the Local Planning Group for the Whittlesea community in the Hume Whittlesea Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN), but the Whittlesea Youth Commitment was first established in 1998 and pre-dates the LLEN.

In 1998 the Northern Area Consultative Committee (ACC) commissioned an action research project to investigate the impact on young people of the introduction of the Youth Allowance. The project identified a lack of connection between the various agencies working with young people, as well as low levels of knowledge by young people of support systems. This was the first of several projects funded by the ACC that identified the need for a collaborative framework.

The Dusseldorp Skills Forum, attracted to a local government area with a history of collaboration to meet local needs, issued an invitation to a number of local organisations to test the concept of a Youth Commitment. Late in 1998, the Northern ACC and the Dusseldorp Skills Forum arranged a meeting attended by a small number of representatives from key agencies and agreed to pursue the idea.

Centred on the transition needs of young people, the Whittlesea Youth Commitment drew together a range of agencies and programs with the aim of developing partnerships that could add value to initiatives. The Northern Interactive Education Area Program (NIECAP), based at the RMIT campus in Bundoora and co-located with the ACC, provided dedicated staff resources to the Youth Commitment for a fixed period of time. This enabled the research activities and evolving management structure of the Youth Commitment to be coordinated and momentum maintained. NIECAP is part of the RMIT University community and regional partnerships agenda, and a particular focus of their work is the transition of young people from school into post compulsory education, training or employment. NIECAP provided executive support and action research capacity to the Youth Commitment.

A Spirit of Cooperation Agreement was signed in February 2000 between employers, job networks, secondary, TAFE and tertiary education providers, the three levels of government, and community agencies.

The Government's implementation of LLEN was based on standard governance arrangements rather than on partnership negotiations and discussion. The government created a Hume Whittlesea LLEN placing the Whittlesea LGA together with the Hume LGA, despite there being no history of strong links or collaboration across these two regions. The formation of the LLEN and the focus on governance arrangements absorbed the momentum of the Youth Commitment, and progress stalled for several years. Lacking project worker support, the Youth Commitment struggled to maintain the systems that had been established.

However, project support to the Whittlesea Youth Commitment has been re-established by the LLEN in 2004 in the form of a “Pathways Development Officer” based in Whittlesea at the NIECAP offices to support the Youth Commitment.

#### **Current Youth Commitment Management Committee**

- City of Whittlesea
- Thomastown Secondary College
- Epping Secondary College
- Northern Interactive Education Area Program (NIECAP)
- Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE
- Centrelink
- Northern Area Consultative Committee (ACC)
- Transition Support
- Apprenticeships Plus
- Kildonan Child and Family Services
- Hume Whittlesea LLEN
- ‘The Hub’ Internet Café

The Whittlesea Youth Commitment was initially resourced by the Northern ACC working with the community to develop funding proposals to the Commonwealth Government for research and piloting new strategies(\$250,000), Dusseldorp Skills Forum providing for interim transition broker funding (\$80,000), the City of Whittlesea (\$40,000) for materials, printing and youth surveys, and the Department of Education, local schools and the School Focused Youth Service (\$50,000) for the original transition broker pilot.

Following the formation of the Hume Whittlesea LLEN, funding for the Youth Commitment continued to be provided by the City of Whittlesea (\$40,000 p.a.) and various stakeholders applied to the LLEN for a number of small project initiatives. No project officer funding was available for two years. From 2004 the LLEN has allocated \$18,000 p.a. as well as funding the coordinator position. NIECAP and NMIT also provide funding for specific projects.

The 2001 Report of the Prime Minister’s Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce, *Footprints in the Future*, cited the Whittlesea Youth Commitment as the only example of best practice in collaboration in their review of initiatives across Australia.

Whittlesea is the only Youth Commitment partnership not funded by ECEF / DEST.

#### **Achievements**

The Whittlesea Youth Commitment first developed and piloted such approaches and key resources such as the use of environmental scans, common school exit procedures, the distribution of school leavers guides and education /training passports and the concept of the Community Team to assist with tracking and community case management.

Since 2000, government schools have pooled funds to support transition brokers in Whittlesea. The transition brokers are widely recognized as the most significant achievement to have emerged from the Whittlesea Youth Commitment.

The initial trial of the idea of transition brokers resulted from a successful joint application in 1999 by eight schools to the Victorian Department of Education to appoint a short-term transition worker. From July 1999, the broker contacted 24 students who had left local schools earlier that year, and whose destinations were not known. The initial results were so encouraging, that these schools decided to pool funds allocated by the Victorian Government for Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) to resource a number of transition broker positions. Seven of these government schools have now been jointly resourcing three transition broker positions for the past four years. These brokers have tracked and assisted more than 2000 young people in this time.

The transition brokers (supported by NIECAP and the City of Whittlesea) have been able to collect and present improved data on what is happening to young people such as destination survey data distributed at Community Team meetings. Through Community Team meetings the brokers have also been able to inform those working in other agencies of their experiences working with early school leavers and the lessons that have emerged.

The Community Team process has assisted in bringing agencies together, helping to create a more cohesive community and making it easier to identify where the gaps are. The Community Team also conducts 'case conference' hypotheticals which have proved valuable for transition brokers providing them with a wider perspective.

2002-2003 mentoring project funded by DOTARS and NIECAP, the LYPET (Linking Young People to Employment and Training) which sought to reengage marginalized young people in education, training or employment. The program helped them to build their skills base and provided them with the support of a mentor.

This mentoring partnership project emerged from work undertaken between Centrelink Epping and the WYC in 2002 that identified 60 young people between the ages of 16 and 17 who had exited school the year before and had received job seeker Youth Allowance for 10 months without intensive support and management. The mentoring project aimed to identify employers with skills needs who were prepared to offer part-time work to young people, introducing them to an industry and allowing them to demonstrate work readiness. The mentor supports the young person through the process of developing job readiness, and then finding and retaining employment.

A recent project 'Youth Voice', funded by the Hume Whittlesea LLEN, conducted a survey of students from local schools in Years 9 and 10, and disengaged and "at risk" young people identified through local service providers dealing with 'high needs' young people. This youth participation approach was designed to ensure that the Youth Commitment is youth driven, focused and responsive. Youth Voice is resulting in greater involvement of young people in the Whittlesea Youth Commitment and the intention is that teams of young people will develop a series of outlets for a youth voice including

youth websites, forum, newspaper and radio. Youth representatives are also being incorporated into the Community Team and the Committee of Management.

### **Impact on Services**

*Has it changed the way that people work together across sectors and agencies? Absolutely! (Local Government representative)*

The involvement of all government secondary schools in the Whittlesea Youth Commitment has resulted in new forms of collaboration across these schools. To fund the three transition broker positions across the Whittlesea schools, the principals agreed to use their State Government MIPs allocation to jointly employ the transition brokers. This arrangement has been in place for over four years.

While agreeing to share resources for transition brokers, the schools had not made significant attempts to use the cluster to broaden curriculum provision. Cooperation and strong working relationships has also led to a healthy debate in these schools about the need for alternative education provision. These schools have jointly commissioned an investigation of their curriculum and program choices in an attempt to better meet the needs of all their students. The principals are working together to address the issues that affect student achievement in the seven schools including curriculum offerings, teacher workforce morale, the satisfaction and involvement of parents, discipline policies for students, and the infrastructure of the schools. Such cooperation and engagement would not have been possible before the Youth Commitment began.

The data reported by the transition brokers demonstrates the importance of the VET sector, and particularly TAFE Institutes, in providing a pathway for early school leavers. Early school leavers use TAFE as the main pathway to employment and further training.

The main local TAFE provider, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE, responded to the issues identified by the Youth Commitment and established a new Youth Unit to draw together a range of programs and services to meet the needs of young people. An early initiative of this Unit was to introduce the General Certificate 1 in VET for local school students and young unemployed people. The TAFE Institute also coordinates a “Lets Look at Work” program for Year 10 students through JPP funding, an important option for local schools to allow students at this level to explore vocational options one day a week for a term.

Centrelink, an active partner in the Youth Commitment, responded to the initial ACC studies that identified the extent of difficulty young people, and particularly early school leavers, had in understanding and accessing services through Centrelink. The Centrelink Epping Office changed their mode of operation in dealing with schools and early school leavers, adopting a case manager approach and allocating a specific officer to work with each school. ‘Centrelink on Campus’ at RMIT also evolved out of the Whittlesea Youth Commitment, with various Centrelink Offices in the wider region providing services on

campus at RMIT. In 2003, Centrelink was an important partner in the LYPET mentoring project that attempted to re-engage young people in employment and training.

The City of Whittlesea has been a strong supporter of the Youth Commitment from its inception and has focused the practical support provided on developing and producing tools and resources such as the student passport, the school leavers guide and transition worker resources.

## **The Approach**

The Whittlesea Youth Commitment approach has been strongly influenced by the availability of action research capability of the Northern Area Consultative Committee (ACC) and the Northern Interactive Education Area Program (NIECAP), both co-located at the RMIT campus in Bundoora. The series of initial studies commissioned by these agencies, supplemented by access to the support of the Dusseldorp Skills Forum, provided both identification of the need for action and some key tools that could be tried under a community partnership model.

As a result of the coordination of the Youth Commitment's location with these agencies at RMIT, there was an early emphasis on collecting data and measuring impact that had two effects; providing some base line data about the extent of the problems faced by young people in the community, and providing a means of determining whether progress was being made.

The key strategy adopted has been the introduction of transition brokers available to all government schools, and the data that they have been able to collect and distribute on the destinations of early school leavers has been able to demonstrate the improvement that can result from case management and tracking these individuals

## **Challenges**

The most significant challenge to the Whittlesea Youth Commitment has been establishing and clarifying relationships within the Hume Whittlesea LLEN. Decisions on whether to remain focused on smaller or wider geographic areas, the need to establish new and untested personal relationships, loss of identity and the interruptions to staffing, resourcing and planning all required a new set of negotiations and agreements. After several years, recognition of the need for the Youth Commitment to be provided with dedicated administrative and project support has again provided the Youth Commitment with capacity to move forward. The appointment of a project officer and agreement that the Whittlesea Youth Commitment would be the Local Planning Group for the LLEN quickly re-energised the Youth Commitment.

But it remains difficult for local agencies to decide whether to put energy into the broader LLEN or the local Whittlesea Youth Commitment. One view held by local government sees the Whittlesea Youth Commitment as the vehicle for local action (due to the level of

local ownership) while the LLEN is the vehicle to manage back to State Government on local issues.

Another challenge that developed from the period when relationships were being redefined with the LLEN was the discovery that some of the previous achievements of the Youth Commitment started to unravel without attention and support. For example, schools had previously agreed to use common exit forms for school leavers, but this had broken down. The Community Team continued to meet, but without project support, much of the energy and focus was lost. The appointment of a project officer has seen these issues begin to be addressed again.

The Whittlesea Youth Commitment has established a set of supports for schools and disengaged students that have proved to be effective in improving outcomes for young people. However, to date the partnership has had limited success engaging the business community and employers. Employers have not engaged in helping to develop a 'compelling' product comparable with transition brokers or mentors in schools. This is despite a large number of employers being signatories to the establishing Spirit of Cooperation Agreement in 2000. Attempts are being made to develop an employment brokerage approach that will engage employers, and an approach being explored that some believe will achieve this is the Dusseldorp Skills Forum's Work Keys program based on skill development through casual work. The feasibility of this approach is currently being explored.

A final challenge is that lack of clarity in reporting and accountability arrangements, particularly now that the Youth Commitment is working together with the LLEN. Transition brokers are employed by the schools and report back to the principals. They also report to the Community Team and the Committee of Management, both of which have the capacity to make suggestions to the brokers and principals through the Transition Coordinator. Information is provided on an 'as needed' basis to supporters such as the Dusseldorp Skills Forum. However, there is a lack of integrated reporting back to the community on the extent to which outcomes for young people have been improved.

The uncertainty around reporting and accountability is an indication that not much progress has been made towards achieving a greater sense of community responsibility for outcomes achieved by young people.

## **MAIN OUTCOMES**

Four years implementing transition brokerage confirms the effectiveness of the strategy having increased retention, reduced the percentage of early school leavers going to unknown destinations, and increased the percentage of early school leavers who achieve positive outcomes in the short to medium term.

The following table provides information on the destinations of early school leavers reported by Whittlesea transition workers over a four year period. The average number of uncontactable clients averages 14.25% over this four year period.

**Table 17: Whittlesea Early School Leaver Destinations, 2000-2003, All Schools**

Destination	2000	2001	2002	2003
Uncontactable or no further assistance required	87	65	86	68
Seeking Employment	48	72	48	46
TAFE	73	91	63	86
Apprenticeships/Traineeships	73	54	56	47
Full-time Employed	28	46	29	25
Other Employed	28	15	27	23
Other Schools	175	151	171	153
Interstate / Overseas	48	22	26	33
Other	25	18	16	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>534</b>	<b>522</b>	<b>496</b>

Since 1999 (when transition workers were first employed), apparent Year 7 to Year 12 retention has improved by 8% across the seven Whittlesea school, and in 2002, for the first time in many years, was equal to the statewide average. In 1999 16% of the total number of Year 9 to Year 12 students in the Whittlesea public schools left early and did not go on to further education at another school. By 2002 this had reduced from 16% to 8%.

Within the Whittlesea cluster, student retention from Years 10-11, 11-12 and 7-12 is now generally at or above the 'like-school' mean across the State. Two of the seven schools have retention rates that are above the like school mean for each of the retention data sets collected from schools. These are all schools in which transition workers support students in Years 10, 11 and 12.

**Table 18: Comparison of Whittlesea school retention with Victorian 'like-school' state average**

	Year 10-11 Retention	Year 11-12 Retention
<b>Secondary College 1</b>	Above the mean	Slightly below the mean
<b>Secondary College 2</b>	Above	Slightly above
<b>Secondary College 3</b>	Below	Below
<b>Secondary College 4</b>	Above	Above
<b>Secondary College 5</b>	Above	At the mean
<b>Secondary College 6</b>	Above	Above
<b>Secondary College 7</b>	At the mean	Above

Source: P. Cole, *Whittlesea Secondary College: Later Years Project, Report 1*, 2004.

Transition brokers have had a significant impact on improving early school leaver destinations, with problematic outcomes falling from 75% in 1999, to 43% in 2002 (based on destination reporting of the transition brokers). When contrasted with another network of schools over the same period of time in a similar region of Victoria and with a slightly more disadvantaged profile, but without access to transition workers, the level of problematic outcomes declined from 73% in 1999 to 66% in 2002. Transition workers

improved the situation in Whittlesea by 32% compared to 7% in the region without transition brokers. (*J Speirings: Sept 2003 Paper, Whittlesea Spirit of Cooperation Agreement*)

Whittlesea

Similarly, transition workers appear to have had a positive impact on reducing the numbers of students leaving school early in Years 9, 10, 11 and 12. Between 1999 and 2002, the numbers of students in those years leaving school without transferring to another school dropped from 16% to 8% of the Year 9-12 school population. In the comparable Victorian region that did not have access to transition brokers, the rate of early school leaving dropped by 5%, compared to 8% across the Whittlesea schools.

(*J Speirings: Sept 2003 Paper, Whittlesea Spirit of Cooperation Agreement*)

Whittlesea

When destination data from 7 schools using transition brokers is compared with the destination data of all 15 schools in the Victorian Hume Whittlesea LLEN region in 2001 (the most recent year for which comparable data is available). Note that the 15 schools include the 7 which have transition workers (and that they are likely an estimated 50 per cent of early leavers in these schools), so the overall performance is improved by the presence of the transition workers in those schools.

**Table 19: 2001 Hume Whittlesea LLEN data**

Destination	Year 10 exits	Year 11 exits	Year 12 exits (no VCE)	Total	All 15 Schools	Broker Outcomes in 7 schools
Other schools	134	70	9	<b>213</b>	<b>26.8%</b>	28.2%
Interstate	11	9	1	<b>21</b>	<b>2.6%</b>	2.1%
Overseas	5	7	3	<b>15</b>	<b>1.8%</b>	2.0%
F/T Employment	39	44	11	<b>94</b>	<b>11.8%</b>	11.4%
Traineeship	51	54	12	<b>117</b>	<b>14.7%</b>	10.1%
Seeking Employment	26	47	31	<b>104</b>	<b>13.1%</b>	13.4%
Other	40	32	8	<b>80</b>	<b>10.0%</b>	3.3%
Unknown	54	65	30	<b>149</b>	<b>18.7%</b>	12.1%
TAFE						17.0%
Total	360	328	105	<b>793</b>		

\* inc: TAFE enrolments

The reduction in numbers going to “unknown” destinations is significant, as are the lower numbers in the “other” category. Linking early school leavers to TAFE options has been a very important pathway facilitated by the transition workers.

Student retention and transition for the seven Whittlesea schools shows that they all have higher than average numbers of students leaving in Year 12 to attend TAFE than is the case statewide. Three schools have between 15-20% more students leaving to attend TAFE than the statewide average, and in another school it is 44% more going to TAFE than average. The proportion leaving school to take up full-time employment varies across the schools, with three schools having a higher proportion than statewide, and four

schools having a lower proportion than statewide. All schools are below the mean average for students exiting to attend university.