

Blacktown Youth College

39 Mackellar Rd, Bidwill, NSW, 2770; Duff St, Broken Hill, NSW, 2880; Yileena Ave, Lawson, NSW, 2783

Established in 1997, Blacktown Youth College (BYC) is an independent, alternative community school operating from 3 campuses in New South Wales (Bidwill, Lawson and Broken Hill). BYC offers a *diverse holistic program* for young people, aged 14 to 20, who have become disengaged from education, but who are committed to learning and wish to complete their Year 10 studies. This includes students who have been excluded from or were not coping with mainstream schooling for various reasons and/or 'at risk' factors, such as homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, or domestic violence. In 2013, 130 students enrolled at Bidwill BYC – including 40% Indigenous and increasing numbers of Polynesian students.

How this program works

Underpinned by the motto *hope through change*, Blacktown Youth College aims to provide a *nurturing, yet challenging learning program* meeting the educational and social needs of students. The school aims to contribute to *breaking the cycle of poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage by tackling educational barriers faced by students and their families*. Adopting a *case management* approach, each student has an individual learning plan. Students are encouraged to *strive for and celebrate* increased academic success. There is a strong focus on student well-being. *The Rite Journey* program aims to *better equip* students' *transition to adulthood*. A counsellor is available on site at all times during school hours and there is a peer mentoring program. There are no uniforms and students have a high level of freedom that comes with additional responsibilities. BYC promotes a *restorative discipline* approach and has a strictly enforced drug-free and alcohol-free policy. Students can access assistance with employment and further education planning.

BYC operates from 9.00am-2.30pm, 4 days a week. Students undertake a *flexible, partial life-skills program*, leading to the completion of their Year 10 studies and attainment of the Record of School Achievement (ROSA). Subject areas include: Personal Development/Health/Physical Education (P.D.H.P.E.), Visual Art, Design and Technology (DT), Food Technology and Hospitality and Work Education. Three new learning spaces completed in 2012 are set up for *project-based and individualised* learning. There is an emphasis on *hands-on learning* and activities are designed around students' interests e.g. designing and constructing a skateboard as a DT elective. Students also undertake work experience and volunteer in the community. School-TAFE (Technical and Further Education) links enable students to obtain their White Card credential for employment in the construction industry. There is a focus on literacy and numeracy with *one-on-one coaching* available in reading, writing and mathematics. Students may enrol at any point in the year after attending a group interview with parents and/or caseworkers.

Outcomes

Positive outcomes, indicating the success of this program, include: changes in student well-being and motivation to learn, enrolment, attendance and graduation rates, and student destinations:

Credentialed attainment: Previously, around 20-30 students graduated each year from their Year 10 studies; in 2011, around 35 students, across all 3 campuses, graduated with their Life-skills ROSA.

Program wide achievements: Graduation rates improved in the last 12 months to 65% of students aged 16 and over attaining the ROSA in 2012.

Individual student achievements: A former BYC student was nominated for the 2012 Youth Action and Policy Association NSW (YAPA) Outstanding Youth Leader award. Four students have obtained ADF Long Tan Leadership awards.

Destinations and pathways: Past students have gained places in mainstream and selective high schools to study in Year 11 and 12. Around 65% of students are in employment within a few months of graduating. Of the 2011 cohort, 27 students entered the workforce, 8 went into further study and 10 continued at BYC in a Year 10 bridging course.

Engagement and participation in learning: Grown from 10-12 students enrolled in 1997 to 130 enrolled at Bidwill in 2013. Attendance rates are increasing, with average attendance of 54 students (August 2011), including 30 Indigenous students. Students' perceptions of their abilities change - many students comment at the end of term 2 that they are now able to *do maths* (2011).

Engagement with families: BYC organises community lunches where parents and carers can visit the school and interact with the staff. Parents fed back positively on the benefits of these events e.g. being able to meet the teachers and familiarity with the school community (2011).

Wider influence: BYC began as one school and has expanded to 3 campuses across New South Wales, the main campus aiding the satellite campus to establish themselves as registered schools and adopt an innovative approach to the Year 10 curriculum.

Why this program is successful

BYC consider the *essential features* that bring about positive change as: *facilitating a caring and nurturing learning environment, a hands-on approach to learning, a holistic vision of facilitating the transition of young people into responsible adulthood, promoting good working relationships between staff, parents and students, instilling a respect for self, others and property, accommodating all levels of learning by challenging bright students and assisting those with learning difficulties, and partnership work with community agencies providing welfare, health and transition support to students.*

Want to know more?

<http://dusseldorp.org.au/programs/blacktown-youth-college/>

<http://www.blacktownyouthcollege.nsw.edu.au/>

Sources of information

Blacktown Youth College (2013) School Website (accessed 13.03.2013)

Blacktown Youth College (2013) School Plan.

Blacktown Youth College (2011) National Partnership on Low SES School Communities Situational Analysis Report 5 October 2011.

Blacktown Youth College (2011) Annual Report.

Youth Action Policy Association (2009, 2012) YapRap Newsletter JunJul2009 & JunJul2012

Please note, where possible and appropriate, we have adopted the language and terminology used by the program sources (*italic fonts*) and referred to the most recent publically available information.

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