

Hands on Learning McClelland College

Belar Avenue, Frankston, VIC, 3199

Established in 1999, Hands On Learning (HOL) is a one-day a week in-school engagement program that supports middle years students at risk of disengaging from school. HOL operated in 29 schools in Victoria in 2013, with most schools funding this from within their existing budgets. Approximately 660 students took part in HOL in Victorian Schools in 2013. Students work in small groups on *creative building projects* that help students *develop confidence and a sense of personal achievement*. HOL was implemented at McClelland Secondary College (McCC) in 2009, running four days per week, with four different cohorts of students in 2013. Located in Frankston, McCC is a government funded school with 862 students (450 male, 412 female, 3% Indigenous students, 12% language background other than English in 2012) offering VCE and VCAL programs. Students involved in HOL have typically experienced barriers to schooling due to: numeracy/literacy issues, risk taking and disruptive behaviour, health/mental health issues, abuse and home violence, and alcohol/drug misuse. In 2013, 50 students (38 male and 12 female) took part in HOL at McCC.

How this program works

HOL aims to *build self-esteem, confidence* and a *culture of success* to help students *at risk* of becoming early school leavers *to achieve and get the most out of school*. HOL is a *targeted early intervention* program working with small groups of students from across Years 7-10. Students attend HOL voluntarily. Ten students work with two adults (who are Education Support Staff but referred to as *artisan-teachers*), one day a week, in an applied learning environment on construction projects that benefit the school and local community. All HOL teams begin by building and fitting out a hut that then serves as their base. At McCC further projects include: a chicken coop for the science faculty, sets for the annual school production, work on the Frankston Community Garden and a renovation of the Balnarring foreshore rotunda. By engaging, as a team, in real and relevant projects, students develop *intra and inter-personal skills, self-management, basic literacy and numeracy, and school attachment*. Parental involvement is encouraged through family pizza nights and volunteer opportunities e.g. in the vegetable garden and patchwork quilt making.

Core to HOL is the formation of *positive, productive and meaningful relationships* based on *trust and respect* with other students and adult role models. This is facilitated by using a 'first name basis' for staff and not wearing school uniform on HOL days. Students are well-supported within a *safe and friendly environment* where *healthy life skills* are modeled in a practical way, for example by preparing and eating lunch together. Students are helped to set goals, given opportunities to lead, explore their own interests, and the space to make and learn from their mistakes. All HOL students have a *focus plan*, which is used to help students identify and develop key social skills and behaviours with the support of their teachers and peers. HOL is an integral part of McCC's whole school approach of supporting students to discover and develop their *passions and talents* through *flexible learning environments and personalised learning programs*. The HOL and school staff work with each other to connect student experiences in HOL to their learning and development during their other 4 days at school. The HOL team at McCC also support students in the program to do their VCAL placements at HOL.

Outcomes

Positive outcomes are of three types: explicitly related to the HOL program at McCC; overall HOL program outcomes that are likely to be relevant to McCC; and overall McCC outcomes to which the HOL activities are likely to have contributed:

Program wide achievements: Across all schools, HOL delivers *net positive socioeconomic outcomes* (estimated at a \$12 return to every \$1 of investment in ensuring year 12 completions (DA Economics 2012) *representing a sound economic and social investment in improving the outcomes for disengaged, disadvantaged students*. Results from a HOL Literacy and Numeracy Knowledge pilot program at another school showed improvements for the 18 students involved from pre-test average scores of 52% to post-test average scores of 84% and is indicative of the impact HOL can have (2008).

Destinations and pathways: Five Year 10 McCC-HOL students, who previously wanted to leave school, successfully moved into VCAL (2010). Across HOL, 92% of students move into apprenticeships or further study and the overall HOL alumni unemployment rate is 2.2% compared to 10.8% for all Australian youth (HOL website 2013).

Engagement and participation in learning: Across HOL, students show a 54% decrease in unexplained absences; 83% decrease in behavioural detentions and have a 98% attendance rate (2013). Across HOL schools, teachers report HOL students *are more willing to attempt academic tasks that they previously could see no point in, and many have become more cooperative and less disruptive to other students* and that the *self-esteem boost* students receive through HOL *helps them perform significantly better when they return to the classroom environment for the rest of the week* (2013). A Year 8 McCC HOL student states - *having this [HOL] one day a week means I can make it through school for the rest of the week* (2013).

Health and well-being: Across HOL, students show a 24% increase in intra-personal and inter-personals skills; 28% increase in self-management skills (2013). Feedback from HOL students at various schools indicates HOL has positive impacts on confidence, self-esteem, behaviours, social interactions, friendships and ability to deal with bullying.

Civic/community participation: HOL students built a chicken coop for the science faculty, sets for the annual school production, worked on the Frankston Community Garden and renovated the Balnarring foreshore rotunda.

Engagement with families: HOL has increased parent engagement and positive involvement with the school through family pizza nights and parents volunteering in the vegetable garden and patchwork quilt making.

External recognition: In 2013, HOL was showcased in the academic books *The Self-Transforming School* and *Expansive Education*. HOL also features as a case study in the DEECD's 2010 paper on flexible learning options.

Why this program is successful

The founder of HOL highlights the importance of offering something different to students within the school environment that *freshens up their spirit and gives them a desire to come back in [to the classroom] and go on with school*. At McCC, the HOL team's success is attributed, in part, to their ability to be a *vital link* between 'at risk' students and the rest of the school, keeping teachers and coordinators updated on student successes, working closely with family members to keep them positively involved in the school and to ensuring that students see HOL as an integral part of their schooling, connected to the rest of their week at school - *not a bolt on external program*.

Want to know more?

<http://dusseldorp.org.au/programs/hands-on-learning-mcclelland-secondary-college/>

<http://mcclellandcollege.vic.edu.au/beyond-the-classroom/hands-on-learning.html>

<http://www.handsonlearning.org.au>

Sources of information

ACARA My School Website, McClelland Secondary College School Profile 2012 (Accessed 09.12.13)
DEECD (2010) Pathways to re-engagement through flexible learning options. DEECD Student Wellbeing Division.
Deloitte Access Economics (2012) The socio-economic benefits of investing in the prevention of early school leaving.
Hands on Learning Website (Accessed 06.12.2013), HOLA Newsletter May 2013 and DVD 2011
Hands on Learning Australia, Snapshot of Barriers impacting the delivery of Hands on Learning in Victoria, May 2010
McCarthy, E. (2011) Evaluation report of the HOLA/Anglicare Partnership at McClelland Secondary College.
McClelland College Website (Accessed 06.12.2013) and McClelland Secondary College 2012 Annual Report
McClelland College Application 2013

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 publicly available information.

This vignette was developed in 2013 by **The Victoria Institute for Education, Diversity and Lifelong Learning** (part of the Australian Government's Collaborative Research Network) for the project *Putting the jigsaw together: innovative learning engagement programs in Australia* and supported by the **Ian Potter Foundation**.

