

## St Luke's Educational Services Unit

St Luke's Anglicare, 175-187 Hargreaves St, Bendigo, VIC, 3550

Established in 2006, St Luke's Educational Services Unit (ESU) is part of St Luke's Child Youth & Family Services. ESU is a Tier 4 Flexible learning option (Alternative Setting) of the Bendigo Education Plan, for young people aged 12 to 17 years who are unable to attend mainstream school, mainly due to extreme behavioural issues. Most students are living in out-of-home care (50%), on statutory orders and/or involved with St Luke's Intensive Case Management (ICMS), Placement Prevention and Family Services. The program is based on a deemed enrolment scheme where young people remain enrolled at surrounding mainstream schools and attend classes off campus through St Luke's. The Unit employs nineteen staff and works with 45 students.

### How this program works

ESU aims to provide young people the *chance to explore options in a non-threatening and supportive environment, ultimately to equip participants with the skills needed to address behavioural issues and return to mainstream educational options*. ESU *acknowledges the barriers faced by individual students but these barriers are not the focus*. Taking a *strengths-based* approach, every student has an Individual Education Plan (IEP) based on their strengths and interests that includes curriculum options and a focus on their *wellbeing* and *self-confidence*. An *active* student support group (SSG), including the student, their parent/carer, representatives from the enrolling school and Department of Education and Early Childhood Development regional office, nominated case worker, teaching staff and the Manager of ESU, regularly meets to review the IEP. Every student receives case management support from their referring school or agency or St Luke's youth services. Students attend the program for one to six years before returning to their neighbourhood school or being assisted to take a more suitable pathway such as TAFE studies, apprenticeships or employment.

The program offers a range of educational options enabling students to pass at their high school year level and/or achieve vocational Certificates (TAFE) and industry training credentials such as the White Card or Food Handlers. Other learning domains include Outdoor Education, Music, Art, Industrial skills (carpentry/ small engines), work experience, group work and life skills. Students have individual timetables that take account of their learning and situational needs. Attendance at ESU 1:1 literacy/numeracy is compulsory for every student (minimum of 4 hours per week). There is a mix of 1:1 and group work with a maximum of 6 students with 2 teaching/program staff.

### Outcomes

Positive outcomes, indicating the success of this program, include: re-engagement with a learning environment, partial or full re-engagement with mainstream settings, developing educational, vocational and training pathways, improved literacy/numeracy, increased confidence, and improved behaviour:

**Program wide achievements:** Practical examples of improved literacy/numeracy given by students include: *being able to read movie and TV guides, using public transport and transport timetables, reading the sport section of the newspapers, starting to enjoy magazines, and planning shopping and purchases*. One parent commented, *He has started reading in bed. I can't believe it.* (2009)

**Destinations and pathways:** Some participants reengaged with mainstream schools (14 of 45), other students moved into pre-apprenticeships or employment (5) and 18 continued at ESU (2012).

**Engagement and participation in learning:** Student numbers increased from 14 students in 2006 to 51 in 2010. The program has recorded strong student attendance patterns of 87% (2012).

**Health and well-being:** Strong student participation in the recreation/mentoring program - almost 100% attendance rate (2009). Student perspectives on the positive effects of ESU include *I am more confident and not as shy now, I trust these guys and that's pretty hard for a student, I have some friends now*. Both students and stakeholders note improvements in student behaviour and increased levels of confidence. Also, *there are less placement breakdowns with kids attending the ESU*. (2009).

**Engagement with families:** Parents and family members who had not previously had positive relationships with educators have become involved: as one grandparent said, *Those people are great. He is learning things and I get along with them as well*. (2009)

**Productive partnerships:** Local schools provide positive feedback on the program. As one school principal states: *St Luke's is the best manager of this sort of educational service, with these young people and their families. Especially when the program is joined up with other services like ICMS Before... there was nothing for them in Bendigo*. (2009)

**Wider influence:** For many years, the Victorian Council of Social Services has championed ESU. ESU attracts many visitors from schools and community organisations Australia-wide who are interested in the success of the model and its partnerships. ESU also operates an *outreach* educational program in Maryborough for 12-14 year-old young people who have been exited from school and have no access to other educational options.

### **Why this program is successful**

An evaluation conducted in 2009 found that the 1:1 and small group teaching, and recreation/mentoring components are perceived by staff, students and stakeholders to be *integral to success* in re-engaging students with a learning environment. Students felt they benefit from the small teaching groups and 1:1 approach as they like the teachers, they like the casual, personal atmosphere and they feel they can make mistakes and learn in an environment where they are not subject to peer pressure, distractions or bullying. The educational planning, reporting and support mechanisms in place are also well regarded by all stakeholders including carers/parents.

### **Want to know more?**

<http://www.learningchoices.org.au/programs/717/St-Lukes-Specialist-Teaching-Unit.php>

[http://www.stlukes.org.au/Pages/Services/Young\\_People/Youth\\_Resource\\_Team.aspx](http://www.stlukes.org.au/Pages/Services/Young_People/Youth_Resource_Team.aspx)

### **Sources of information**

St Luke's (2013) Youth Resource Team website (accessed 27.02.2013).

St Luke's Anglicare (2011) Annual Report.

McDougall, J. (2009) Review of the Deemed Enrolment Program Education Services from the Youth Resources Team. Bendigo: St Luke's Youth and Family Services.

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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