

Learning Choices EXPO  
Sydney, 24 June 2004  
**Topic: ACE and Young People**  
**Presenter: Delia Bradshaw**

## INTRODUCTION

Good morning. I am honoured to be able to speak about the marvellous work of ACE in Victoria. I'd like to start with three 'hands up' questions:

*Who knows what ACE stands for?*

*Who has ever attended an ACE class/program? Examples?*

*Who has ever taught in an ACE class/program? Examples?*

## COMMENTARY

Yes, ACE stands for Adult and Community Education. Victoria is unique in the strength and diversity of this movement. Today, I'd like to introduce 2 ACE organisations to you, two of hundreds in Victoria.

## DESCRIPTION

**ACE Organisation 1:** *Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre (GNLC)*



**OHT 1:** *GNLC from a distance* (This OHT shows the locale of GNLC.)

**Location/Mission:** GNLC is situated in Glenroy, a semi-industrial suburb in the northwest of Melbourne, with programs in other sites nearby. In its 26 years of operation, it has grown and changed in many ways, reflected in its several name changes. In recent years, GNLC has been working more and more with young people.

GNLC's 4 main goals for 2002-04 are:

1. To respond and connect with its local community and key agencies through partnerships
2. To sustain and develop a vigorous lifelong learning program (for all ages)
3. To generate a neighbourhood house/community development program
4. To build its organisational strength and capacity.

Programs: The Youth Program offers Youth Literacy & Numeracy, Youth Workforce Skills, Youth Living in Glenroy, Youth Media and Youth Computers. Outside of class, time is allocated for individual student review and pathway planning.

OHT 2: GNLC up close (This OHT features the art created by young people working with an acclaimed graphic artist.)



At GNLC, democratic participation is highlighted and fostered. For example, young people take part in planning local initiatives such as the recent *Hey, We're Here: The Voice of Youth* project designed to improve the health and well-being of young people across Glenroy. Young people from GNLC created aerosol art (similar to this OHT) that was displayed in shop windows throughout the shopping centre over several weeks.

People: Young people made up about 10% of the 528 participants in 2003. The 15 to 16 year-olds tended to join the Youth Program. Some young people also studied in Literacy for Road Rules and other Adult Literacy programs.

**ACE Organisation 2: Upper Yarra Community House Learning Centre (UYCHLC)**

**OHT 3: UYCH from a distance (This OHT shows the locale of UYCH.)**



Location/Mission: UYCH is located at Yarra Junction, with various sites in the Dandenong Ranges on the semi-rural eastern edge of Melbourne. UYCH has been offering programs in adult, community and further education since the late 70's. For many years now, it has been developing and expanding educational opportunities for young people in a local, supportive and youth-friendly environment.

**OHT 4: UYCH with a crowd**

(This OHT captures UYCH celebrations for Youth Week 2004 coinciding with the opening of the new VCAL classrooms. It is their own space and they treasure it. The hospitality students put on lunch featuring bush food grown by the young people.)



Programs: As advertised in the Semester One 2004 UYCH Course Guide, Youth Services include:

- JPET - providing support and assistance with work, training, finance and accommodation
- STEP Ahead - a 6-month program for 15 to 16 year-olds who are not in school, are leaving school or who need some time out (with a follow-up program, REAM, Real English and Maths) and
- Youth Pathways Program - for 15-18 year-olds not in mainstream school, combining general education, vocational training and career goal setting.

As well, young people take part in:

- VCAL - at present, in response to need, a Young Mums VCAL is being negotiated and
- 'Burning Spear' - the horticultural program mentioned earlier propagating and retailing bush food.

People: As with similar ACE programs, young people come for a wide range of reasons - *I got kicked out of school, I always felt a loser/an outsider at school, I hated school and hardly went after Year 8.*

**HANDOUT 1:** This contains Contact Details for both organisations. It also contains a copy of 'A Trusty Bridge', a detailed case study of UYCH from *Room to Move*, a study of school/ACE partnerships.

## CONSIDERING THREE KEY QUESTIONS

**OHT 5: Room to Move** (This OHT refers to the study of school/ACE partnerships with the same name.)

*Question 1: What do these two learning communities share in common with each other and with similar ACE organisations?*

In them, we find:

- An adult environment in which taking responsibility is prized, demonstrated and learnt
- A deep and genuine respect for young people where modelling humane adult relationships is expected and spelt out
- The presence of trustworthy, trusting, attentive,



knowledgeable adults as teachers and mentors with the selection of suitable staff and the sustenance of staff cohesion both top priorities

- An educational environment that is very particular about the curriculum with an emphasis, for young people, on learning who they are as much as what and how and why
- A commitment to social and community development as well as personal development by creating a learning community to which young people feel connected and want to belong
- An explicit concentration on meaningful pathways, not only to further education, vocational training and employment but also to greater participation in the community, with detailed attention to follow-up and follow-through
- ACE = Adult and Community Education. One aspect of the community development role, in relation to youth, is a focus on changing the attitudes and relationships of communities to young people, for example, building stronger connections between young people and local businesses or between middle-aged ESL learners and the young people who share the same lunchroom.

*Question 2: Why are ACE programs successful for and with young people?*

- There's the unique character and positioning of ACE - learning communities are small, local, wholistic (bringing together education, vocation and socialisation) and very quick to respond
- ACE has a longstanding and proven track record in working successfully with people of all ages and backgrounds but especially with people who have been disadvantaged, marginalised, neglected and/or rejected by 'the system', as evidenced in its highly-regarded Adult Literacy programs and pioneers.

Recent evidence of public recognition is:

- The Department of School Education approving formal Memoranda of Understanding allowing students enrolled in secondary schools to study in ACE settings
- The number of reports commissioned to document and analyse ACE' s successes

**HANDOUT 2:** This Bibliography gives details of Reports and Resources.

*Question 3: What is the influence of ACE?*

- The 64 partnerships assembled in 2001 in the publication *Room to Move* show how and why school/ACE partnerships expand opportunities for potential early school leavers. That study describes the many combinations and permutations possible, and this growth and diversity continues
- At present, many ACE organisations (including these two) have developed strong, relevant and enduring partnerships (often project-based) with local councils, Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENS), local community organisations, local schools and the networks around VCAL
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- As these partnerships mature, so cross-fertilisation and rich hybrids will continue to offer new visions that, in turn, will contribute to re-thinking and re-forming all education for young people.

## Conclusion

**OHT 6: Life is Respect** (This OHT features the words given pride of place by young people from GNLC when composing a mural in the Glenroy shopping centre some years ago.)



In conclusion, I'd like to finish with the words of two people who know a lot about what matters to young people.

*First*, I'd like to refer to the words of an internationally respected American researcher, Sandra Kerka, summarising the features of effective alternatives for at-risk and out-of-school (not terms I'd use) youth. Her list could be a snapshot of ACE at work:

1. Caring knowledgeable adults
2. A sense of community
3. An assets approach, seeing young people as resourceful, not deficient
4. Respect for youth
5. High expectations for academic achievements and responsible behaviour
6. Wholistic, comprehensive, multidimensional, developmental curriculum
7. Authentic engaging learning that connects school and work
8. Support and long-term follow-up services.

Second, my final words come from a young woman I met in the course of my research. Echoing the views captured so economically in 'Life is Respect', she said:

*I'm here because I stopped going to school because school had a lot of not very nice people. I was constantly at the top of everyone's gossip list and got into a lot of fights... The (ACE) teacher can just make the curriculum more to suit the age group that they are taking and not judge us. They help you a lot, they treat you like you are equal, they give you confidence... I want to finish this course. I think about lots of things and I'm not yet sure what to concentrate on. It is going to be my life and I want it to be good so the decision about my next step needs to be right...*

In solidarity with everyone here, and around Australia, working to broaden and deepen learning choices and experiences for young people, ACE is also creating Room so all the Sarahs can move where they want to go, and can move there with Respect.

#### **THANKS**

Jude Newcombe, Manager GNLC

Sally Brennan, Manager UYCHLC

#### **HANDOUTS 1 & 2**

See below.

## Learning Choices EXPO 2004

### *ACE and Young People*

#### HANDOUT 1: A School-ACE Case Study & Contact Details

#### A TRUSTY BRIDGE by Delia Bradshaw

One image stays with me from our visit to Upper Yarra Community House: the sight of two groups, coming from opposite directions, and meeting on the wooden bridge that links the front part of the community house to offices and classrooms at the back.

From the main building comes a group of mature-age women, laughing and talking, coffee mugs in hand, heading for their classroom. From the other side comes a group of young people, mid-teens. They've just vacated the room where they were talking to us because it is needed by the women. They're heading for the one spare room available, balancing chips and dips, to continue their conversation with us.

The two groups meet in the middle of the bridge and, for a few brief seconds, intermingle, blend and become one. There's no sense of separateness or wanting to keep apart. They merge as part of the bigger community that is Upper Yarra Community House. Then they move apart as easily as they came together. A minute later, the bridge is empty, each group settled in its place, focussed on their separate purposes.

This tiny incident is a powerful image of young people 'at home' in a world made up of many ages, many cultures and many walks of life.

#### **STEP Ahead**

The young people are *STEP Ahead* participants at Upper Yarra Community House. This adult education community agency is at Yarra Junction, a rural community on the outskirts of Melbourne's eastern suburbs. *STEP* stands for Skills, Training and Education Program, funded by DETYA (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs) through the JPET (Jobs Placement, Employment and Training) program. The Australia-wide JPET program offers an alternative to school for young people experiencing difficulties, either socially or academically.

An Upper Yarra Community House brochure elaborates:

*Maybe you are having problems at home (perhaps you have left home), problems at school or because of your cultural or religious background. Maybe you have been charged with a criminal offence, have experienced abuse or violence, or need help to look for a job or accessing allowances from Centrelink. Workers are here to assist you if your age is between 15 and 21 and if you are doing it tough and need to talk to someone.*

The semester-long program is especially suitable for 15 and 16 year-olds who don't expect to complete Year 10 or who are no longer at school. It is a welcome option for local schools seeking alternatives for the students they consider 'at risk'. In fact, Upper Yarra Secondary College has referred students for some time.

Through a relaxed, supportive and wholistic approach, *STEP Ahead* strives to provide young people with the information, skills and self-esteem necessary for future well-being. They are supported until a positive outcome is achieved. The program is delivered through course work sessions and work experience. Participants are in courses at the community house for 3 days a week, and in work experience for 2 consecutive days a week. The course work includes training in computers, driver

education, first aid, numeracy and literacy, health and well-being, food hygiene and preparation, workplace communication, résumés and job search, and creative arts. The work experience is organised after finding out what type of experience the participant wants. Popular choices are hospitality, child care and the automotive trade.

*STEP Ahead* has built up an enviable reputation since it began in 1997. Evidence of this is the recent nomination of Upper Yarra Community House as a 'Best Practice' JPET provider. *STEP Ahead* is an integral part of a much larger and more comprehensive program for young people. Intensive formal and informal arrangements such as complementary programs, support services and open access facilities centre on the needs of young people, particularly young people at risk.

*STEP Ahead* is popular both with young people and local agencies. Julie Hanman, Manager, Youth Services at the community house, gave us a strong sense of this:

*Word-of-mouth is extraordinary. Lots of kids want to do this course. As well, there's a growing span of referrals, for example from Human Services as well as from schools in the district.*

Reasons for its success and popularity include:

- first-rate, tailor-made pioneering curriculum
- quality and continuity of staff experienced both in teaching their technical and vocational training areas and with young people
- expertise in meeting a complexity of learning needs shown by Upper Yarra Community House's outstanding success with those who have failed at school
- extensive and intensive one-to-one support such as counselling and referrals readily on hand
- clarity and accessibility of pathways: to *Work Trax* which gives young people a taste of a range of accredited vocational courses; to traineeships; back to school; to paid and unpaid work
- continuous monitoring, evaluation and improvement of course design and outcomes
- breadth and depth of involvement in local community and government networks, and nearby schools.

### **On being partners**

Upper Yarra Secondary College is a key partner in the history and development of the *STEP Ahead* program. The original JPET funds came through a successful joint tender prepared and submitted by the school and community house together. The Assistant Principal of the College, Garry Embry sees it this way:

*Small, semi-rural communities like this lend themselves to these partnerships. We'd been looking for an alternative setting for a long time. A school can't cater for these students on the same basis.*

The long-standing connection between the adult education community house and the secondary school has taken many forms:

- after-school homework support programs at the house
- out-of-school hours use of school rooms and facilities by the community house
- representation of the school, via the Principal, on the Upper Yarra Community House Management Committee
- School Focussed Youth Project meetings at the house
- school membership of JPET Advisory Group
- regular exchange of publicity brochures and other written information.

Today, the partnership continues to evolve through lots of informal phone contact, particularly between Mika Pediaditis, *STEP Ahead* Coordinator at Upper Yarra Community House, and Jana Riverans, Middle School Coordinator at Upper Yarra Secondary College. They talk about referrals to JPET, adjustment of

students' timetables, transport issues and use of the school bus. Quite clearly, both educational agencies place the best interests of young people at the heart of what they do. Part of their work together in partnership involves developing a shared understanding of what 'at risk' means and agreeing on what environment is most supportive for individual young people experiencing problems.

The secondary school is keen to overcome any misconceptions about *STEP* and JPET that show up in comments from parents like *I don't want my kid there, hanging out on the street all day* or comments from teachers implying that *STEP is for the dummies, a babysitting losers' program*. The school counteracts opposition by circulating, through official school channels, the success stories of JPET graduates.

And the success rate of *STEP Ahead* is high. In all the time it has been running, only one participant failed to finish the course, and that young woman is now back at school, in a new school for her, making a fresh start.

Jana described Upper Yarra Community House as:

*A place where students who have failed at school are given a fresh start, without any history attached. The students don't see it as a school – the people at the house aren't authority or discipline figures for them. With the removal of 'school' barriers, the source of conflict is removed and this allows learning to occur. I love JPET. Often we at school are maintaining them until we can get them into that program. The level of support is immense. They provide individual learning plans for each student. We're very happy for Upper Yarra Community House to be taking them out for that middle school period. The benefit for the kids is being out of school.*

The young people themselves gave us many reasons why *STEP* was better than being at school:

- *Don't like the teachers at school.*
- *School's boring.*
- *I prefer to work on cars.*
- *We get treated like a person at JPET.*
- *The teachers at the house listen more.*
- *They don't treat you as stupid.*
- *They treat you older, not like we're really, really young.*
- *Grow up faster.*
- *Not as many students around.*
- *The course is not as boring.*
- *The groups are small.*
- *We can smoke.*
- *There's no uniform.*

Some said that if not for this course they'd either have stayed at school and failed, or dropped out and stayed at home. All of the young people we met not only loved what they were doing but had plans for the foreseeable few years, whether to get a traineeship, do further study or achieve employment goals.

Asked about the future of *STEP Ahead*, Sally Brennan, Manager of Upper Yarra Community House, replied:

*I see this program getting bigger and bigger. It'll grow in different directions and into different forms, with more and more schools getting involved.*

## **Barriers**

Whilst the partnership between Upper Yarra Community House and Upper Yarra Secondary College is strong and vigorous, neither partner denied there were tough areas, key aspects needing attention and action.

## *Funding*

The limitations imposed by funding were mentioned time and time again, in particular the policy constraints that prevent Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) registered agencies from taking certain students, from using ACFE funds for them and for reporting on them. It seems timely to review funding arrangements and demarcation boundaries that make it difficult for schools and ACE agencies to work together to improve prospects for young people around the legal school leaving age of 15. Current guidelines work against easy movement for these students between ACE and school. As well, without consistency of funding, it is impossible for the two agencies to do forward planning on curriculum matters, particularly VET courses, together.

## *Duty of Care*

Flexible but legal arrangements around health and safety matters such as insurance and duty of care need further work. For example, if school insurance covered two days a week of work experience, instead of the current one day a week, a lot more versatility would be possible at year 9 to encourage experimentation with different mixes of in-school and out-of-school programs.

## *Divided Cultures*

Young people who leave school to take part in courses such as JPET want to maintain friendships with those still at school, in other words, to make the transition from school to JPET and then (if they choose) from JPET back to school easier. At present, the two cultures are quite separate and the divide too great. Again, a blend of being at school and simultaneously in something like a JPET program could bridge this gulf.

## **ACE needs a better press**

Some teachers in some schools still see ACE as second best to TAFE. *A soft option, good on welfare, but not quite up to speed.* Sally believes the ACE sector needs to do much more to market its capacities.

## **Poor communication**

Asked what advice they'd give others considering school/ACE partnerships, both partners stressed that open, clear communication from the very beginning is vital. In Jana's words:

*This means keeping in constant touch, maybe 2 or 3 times per week. Truly working together, with all the relevant parties talking in great detail.*

## **Fear of young people**

Knowing that some ACE organisations find young people threatening or frightening, the Upper Yarra Community House staff recommended seeking out local youth networks, including JPET providers. *Make contact with anyone running a successful young person's program,* urged Julie. Sally added:

*Young people aren't something else. They're not a species apart. They are just young people. The majority of the time they're no different at all. The real issue is about commitment to a broad sense of community. How can you have a picture of your community without a sense of family? Part of providing for youth is about providing for families. If young people take you out of your comfort zone, you're the one with the problem and it's important to have a good look at this.*

This brings us back to the bridge, the meeting place of different ages and life stages. Not that it's always peace and harmony. There are days when the young ones are noisy, even rude. There are days when

older participants are intolerant. What matters is that, as in any community, the issues are dealt with as they arise, on a day-to-day basis. For the young people at Upper Yarra Community House, being able to cross that bridge safely and freely is a huge step in the direction of bridging bigger life difficulties. And the chances of them crossing confidently and co-operatively are much greater if community agencies, both ACE organisations and schools, works as partners.

*From: Bradshaw, Delia. Clemans, Allie. Donovan, Cathy and Macrae, Helen **Room to Move: Why school/ACE partnerships expand opportunities for potential early school leavers** (2001), Department of Education, Employment and Training: Victoria, pp. 21-25*

### **A June 2004 post-script**

(Thanks to Sally Brennan)

As part of the 'Burning Spear Bush Food project', young people made little showcase garden plots to identify and display the plants for visitors. They also made little wooden signs with the names of the plants engraved on them. On other parts of the site, there are tracts of planted ground with a wide variety of plants for propagation, harvesting, processing and retailing, both fresh and dried.

If anyone at your conference can find 10,000 dollars for a drying shed, we would be very grateful.

This is a beautiful all encompassing project - the environment, nature, peacefulness, life's balances, working together outside. At the same site is the mosaic project where young people make absolutely beautiful mosaics to decorate walls and seats and to go along the riverbank in Warburton and outside the visitor centre. As well, with off cuts from the recycled timber yard next door, students make benches and trestle tables and are now selling them. They sell them all very quickly.

### **CONTACT DETAILS FOR 2 ACE ORGANISATIONS**

#### Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre

1<sup>st</sup> floor, 5 Nelson St, Glenroy VIC 3046

Phone: 9304 2830

Fax: 9304 2215

E-mail: [manager@glenlink.vic.edu.au](mailto:manager@glenlink.vic.edu.au)

Manager: Jude Newcombe

#### Upper Yarra Community House Learning Centre

2463 Warburton Highway, Yarra Junction VIC 3797

Phone: 5967 1776

Fax: 5967 2007

E-mail: [education@uych.org.au](mailto:education@uych.org.au)

Manager: Sally Brennan

## Learning Choices EXPO 2004

### ***ACE and Young People***

#### **HANDOUT 2: Bibliography**

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