



Mildura Rural City Council

Organisation: Mildura Rural City Council

Submission Response: Stronger Futures for all Young Victorians- Discussion paper on the youth transitions system

Forward:

Attached is Mildura Rural City Council's (MRCC) response to questions outlined on page 37 of the Stronger Futures for all Young Victorians- Discussion paper on the youth transitions system. Information provided relates directly to the section outlining Opportunities for young people to re-engage with education and training as the lead agency for the delivery of Youth Connections Service in a consortium partnership with Sunraysia Murray Group Training (SMGT).

Background:

The Consortium provides services across a large geographical area situated in northwest Victoria, this includes the MRCC local government area and Robinvale, with approximately 12,000 young people aged between 12 - 25 years. The municipality has a statistically higher than average number of young people who leave education or training before completing year 12 or equivalent. Census results demonstrated that young people not attending education and not completing year 12 is twice the average of Melbourne and higher than the average for regional Victoria. It is estimated that approximately 400 young people are disconnected from mainstream educational options in the regions.

Questions:

Below is a compilation of feedback from MRCC and SMGT as the Youth Connections providers. Youth Connections commenced locally in January 2010 with the delivery of services to at risk and disconnected young people.

1. How can Youth Connections be implemented in Victoria to most effectively re-engage young people with education and training?

MRCC and SMGT are both experienced providers of successful support services to young people re-engaging with education and/or training.

This includes long term disengaged and at risk young people. Both organisations have provided a range of services via the Partnership Outreach Education Model (POEM) program, Youth Connections and Youth Pathways and from these ground level experiences the following elements of successful re-engagement have been identified:

Interface Model of Service:

An Interface Model of service delivery encompasses a streamlined system for school based referral and re-engagement through the Regional Schools Support Services.

By supporting centralised referral and re-engagement Youth Connections providers are able to:

- access the information and background needed to make accurate and timely assessments concerning the young persons needs
- the service is able to avoid duplication of services and frustration amongst participants and their care providers in having to repeat and provide additional information
- the process encourages transparency between schools, families and service providers and ensures all school based supports have been exhausted prior to engagement in the program and supports Youth Connections role to value add to existing services.

Through an interface model of service communication between education and training providers, regional schools and support services, Youth Connections, youth and community agency staff are kept open and clear. This assists in providing a seamless system for referral, engagement and re-engagement. By tracking the young person more effectively, a more individualised service that is responsive to the young person needs, circumstances and supports access to appropriate services is able to be implemented.

The effective and transparent implementation of Youth Connections should include a commitment by the relevant government departments to support the development and implementation of systems on a local level that maximises resources and linkages. Support for a coordinated and well communicated approach for the implementation needs to be demonstrated by all key stakeholders.

Literacy & Numeracy Development:

Strategies available to Youth Connections providers to address the Literacy and Numeracy needs of participants should be highlighted as a major issue for successful and effective re-engagement. Resources and support for long term, on-going literacy and numeracy learning options, particularly those in the 13-15 year age group who have been assessed as severely disengaged prior to re-entry into school, need to be a core priority for both Youth

Connection providers, Partnership Brokers and State government departments to address.

Currently young people who have no or minimal basic literacy and numeracy skills are expected to re-enter into a school environment many years ahead of their ability. Schools are not equip and/or resourced to address the high intensive learning needs of these young people. Without access to literacy and numeracy development the prospect of successful and effective re-engagement is limited.

Resources for Alternative Learning Options:

The lack of alternative settings for personal and educational learning options for young people in the 13-15years age group in regional and rural areas is of considerable concern when striving for sustainable re-engagement of disconnected and at risk young people. Alternative bridging programs in community settings provide the support and attention young people need to build confidence and basic classroom and life skills needed to effectively engage in mainstream learning.

In the Mildura region school based alternative learning is severely limited for those in need. With the inability of Youth Connections to address this as was done previously in this region through the Connections program (a 13 week comprehensive, ongoing community based, personal development and group work program) it now relies on already under resourced schools to cope. Supporting local schools to address this issue is a solution in the long term however, in the interim this is a important gap in services for 13 - 15 year olds and will have a negative effect on these young peoples ability to re-engage.

Localised Responses:

The strength of the Youth Connections program is its ability to implement flexible, localised responses that are based on local needs and gaps in services. Youth Connections Type 4 services being added to the portfolio of the program is of considerable value in supporting the ability to deliver effective outcomes. Suitable time and resources however, needs to be allocated to implement strategies and then evaluate them effectively.

A mechanism for sharing learnings around coordination and collaboration will maximise the value of the program in a broader sense. This could be on a state and regional level and be more effective through electronic media or publications reducing the need for considerable travel for more isolated services.

2. What services should Youth Connections providers use to establish effective referral and working arrangements?

Localised Responses:

In order to offer a holistic service that addresses the needs of the individual participant and sets the foundations for early intervention and prevention as

well as a coordinated crisis responses, providers need to work in partnership with a wide range of services, agencies, organisations and government departments. These key stakeholders need to be engaged by Youth Connection providers and Partnership Brokers in order to be effective in not only direct service provision to young people but to also strengthen communities to address school engagement in the long term.

- regional schools networks
- health & well being services
- services and agencies networks
- culturally specific services
- government departments & agencies
- community services agencies
- local businesses
- community groups

The ability to engage the young person, their families and community will be limited, where communities are unable to access consistent specialist services and support.

3. Should LLENs be provided some flexibility to facilitate and broker service provision to young people 20 and over, inline with the flexibility in Youth Connections service provision?

LLENs should have the flexibility to provide and facilitate a more effective and joined up service through the acknowledgement of the benefits of a stage d response to at risk and disengaged young peoples circumstance and developmental stage.

Developmentally Staged Responses:

Once a clear and transparent service system is established between Youth Connections and other programs and services, support for a more staged response to the needs of disengaged and at risk young people could be identified, developed and implemented.

This response engages at risk and disengaged young people more effectively by acknowledging that young peoples' progress through different developmental phases resulting in different skills levels (cognitive and social) and makes allowances for the individuals learning abilities. This coordination would require support from a range of community and government departments and services, supporting the development of strategies that link early years, middle years, adolescent and early adulthood educators and services.

Implementing a more local stage approach takes into account the developmental stages of the individual and not just the age level. As a result

this would require further investigation and the allocation of more state and local resources (human and financial) to develop and implement strategies.

4. Is the range of qualifications on offer to re-engage young people adequate (Existing qualifications include VCAL, adult VCE, the general Certificate of Adult Education and the Diploma of further Education)?

Targeted Learning:

The ranges of qualification options available are reasonably comprehensive however some of the options eg. Certificate of Adult Education are not targeted to the learning interests, needs or offer the educational experiences required for the adolescent target group. While it is openly acknowledged that a mainstream curriculum is not for everyone the alternative qualifications available need to be valuable and relevant to young people. They need to acknowledge all levels and styles of learning and have content directed at the appropriate age group/s.

By tailoring training and education option more effectively to the needs of the target groups the chance for successful outcomes for the participant increases. This also boosts confidence and sets the foundations for life long learning.

Teachers and instructors who are trained for the adult learning environment are not necessarily qualified or experienced in engaging severely disconnected and/or at risk young people, however they seem to be the ones primary left to deal with these young people in adult learning centres. Trained and resourced secondary teachers struggled with engaging this group and trainers and instructors are expected to work relatively unsupported with their demanding needs.

More resources and professional development need to be made available if young people are to continue accessing learning through adult learning facilities. These organisations need to be able to access support service that are available to mainstream schools if they are working with school aged young people. This includes but is not limited to well-being coordinators, physical and mental health assessment services and psychologists.