



Stronger futures for all young Victorians

A discussion paper on the youth transitions system

The Victorian Youth Mentoring Alliance (VYMA) is the peak body for youth mentoring in Victoria. We are an independent, not-for-profit organisation providing leadership and expertise to ensure the growth of quality youth mentoring across the State. Our vision is for strong, connected Victorian communities where young people have the opportunity to reach their potential through quality mentoring experiences.

Since its establishment in 2005 the Alliance has become accepted as the voice of more than 160 youth mentoring programs in Victoria. Today, the VYMA provides an effective mix of consultation, professional development, resource development and advocacy.

What is Youth Mentoring?

Youth mentoring provides structured and trusting relationships that bring young people together with volunteer mentors who offer guidance, support and encouragement. Mentoring is an effective way of providing young people with supportive and enriching experiences.

Many young Victorians lack a positive role model in their lives, often resulting in disengagement from their school and community. The consequences can include social isolation, low self-esteem, depression and even crime. Early intervention through youth mentoring programs reduces disengagement and helps young people lead fulfilling & productive lives.

Discussion Paper Response

The focus of our recommendations relate to youth mentoring as an effective strategy for keeping young people engaged with school and focused on a clear pathway as they transition through education and training.

Support for making informed education and training choices *(What other actions should be taken to ensure that sound career development services are available to all young Victorians? How can business/industry be more involved in assisting students' career choices?)*

Studies have found that youth mentoring assists young people in making more informed decisions about education and work pathways.¹

The VYMA suggests that the involvement of 'career mentors' for young people could be a key to ensuring they stay focused on the potential outcomes of education and training. Youth mentors can provide first hand advice and knowledge such that young people have access to a real life example of an individual who has achieved their education and career goals.

We believe that business and industry can play an enormous role in the provision of these mentors. Current Victorian youth mentoring programs find that engaging a range of mentors, including those from business, enables young people to access advice and support at important transition times in their lives. For instance The Smith Family's Tertiary Mentoring Program aims to improve tertiary outcomes and support post-education plans by matching young people in tertiary education with mentors from industry.

¹ Carbines, R., Wyatt, T. & Robb, L., 2007. *Evaluation of the Plan-It Youth Program Final Report - Erebus International, Report to the NSW Department of Education and Training.*



Further strengthening completions in the school sector (*What other strategies could be introduced to lift qualification completion rates for young people in the schools and VET sectors?*)

Research tells us that youth mentoring increases school completion rates.² One report found that young people involved in mentoring were 3 times less likely to drop out of school when compared to their non-mentored peers.³

A number of youth mentoring initiatives are helping to keep young Victorians engaged in education by providing supportive one-to-one relationships with caring adults. For example Berry Street Victoria's Reaching More Kids program uses volunteer mentors to connect with 'at risk' students to help keep them engaged.

One-to-one relationships have been recognised by DEECD as one of the most important protective factors for young people. The Department has made a recommendation that there be an: "establishment of strategies to develop a student's sense of belonging to a school community and their ability to deal with life circumstances including the establishment of a one-to-one relationship with a caring adult."⁴

The establishment of youth mentoring programs in schools is a proactive way to ensure young people have access to these important one-to-one relationships. Yet the VYMA is unaware of any current resourcing from DEECD to support these programs.

Articulation from school to VET and higher education (*What other initiatives would improve school to tertiary education articulation and support young people to take advantage of the expansion of these sectors?*)

Youth mentoring helps young people stay connected during periods of transition. At times when young people are moving from VET to higher education, or indeed to employment, mentors sourced from these sectors can play an important role in helping young people successful link into these new opportunities.

The recent Mentors for Our Students pilot, funded through DEEWR, matched year 9-12 students with retired persons who provided industry and career support. A key objective of this project was to assist young people in staying connected with opportunities that would assist them in entering a skills shortage area. Unfortunately funding for this project did not continue beyond a year, resulting young people being disconnected from the very relationship that aimed to keep them connected.

Opportunities for young people to re-engage with education and training (*How can Youth Connections be implemented in Victoria to most effectively re-engage young people with education and training?*)

Young people involved in mentoring have improved school 'connectedness' in the form of positive feelings and attitudes towards school.⁵

A sense of connection is particularly important when attempting to reengage young people in education or training. Assistance of a mentor, who can respond to the particular needs of a young people, can assist young people in reconnection. Spending time with a mentor who volunteers to simply be there for the young person can have an enormous impact.

² Lamb, S. & Rice S., 2008. *Effective strategies to increase school completion (Draft Discussion Paper)*. Centre for Post-Compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne.

³ Tierney, J.P. and Grossman, J.B. 2000. *Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters*, Private Public Ventures

⁴ *The Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools, 1998*. Department of Education, Victoria.

⁵ Herrera, C., 2004. *School based mentoring: A Closer Look*. Public/Private Ventures, Philadelphia.