

Bundoora Secondary College Project

2013

Exploring the Engagement of At-risk Students through Flexible Support
and Program Delivery

Evaluation Report

April 2014

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Acknowledgements

The *Bundoora Secondary College Project 2013* is a collaborative activity of the Bundoora Secondary College, Banyule Youth Services, Inner Northern Youth Connections Consortium (NMIT) and the Banyule Nillumbik Local Learning Employment Network (BNLLEN).

The Partners in the Project wish to thank the Members of the Bundoora Secondary College Project 2013 Advisory Group:

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The *Bundoora Secondary College Project 2013 - Exploring the Engagement of At-risk Students through Flexible Support and Program Delivery*, was a joint initiative between Banyule Nillumbik LLEN, Bundoora Secondary College, Banyule City Council and Youth Connections (NMIT is the Lead Agent) developed in response to recommendations of the *2012 Banyule Nillumbik Under 16 Project Report*¹. The project was funded through the Banyule Nillumbik Youth Connections Consortia.

The *Bundoora Secondary College Project 2013* aimed to build on and support the Parallel Program, which had been implemented at Bundoora Secondary College at the start of 2013. The Parallel Program provides an alternative range of learning options for students identified as being at severe risk of leaving school. The Parallel Program has been provided predominantly to Year 10 students, but also includes some severely at risk students from other year levels.

Central to the Project was the engagement of Youth Worker who was seconded from Banyule Youth Services and was based at the school two days per week to implement the project aims and achieve the outcomes outlined below.

Project Aims

The aims of the Bundoora Secondary College Project were, to:

- Strengthen the existing Parallel Program at Bundoora Secondary College
- Build opportunities for at risk students
- Build sustainable school and community relationships
- Facilitate engagement of parents /guardians
- Facilitate connections to agencies that address the issues impacting on the students

The Bundoora Secondary College Project sought to achieve these outcomes:

- Improved student attendance and engagement in education and school community
- Development of a parent/family engagement strategy
- Documentation of alternative approach to purposeful education and 'real life' curriculum
- Documentation of procedures developed with community agencies

¹ The *2012 Banyule Nillumbik Under 16 Project* provides a measure of young people who are not engaged in school. The reasons contributing to disengagement are provided from the view of participating schools, those who work to support young people and from young people who have experienced school disengagement first hand.

Project Scope

The primary focus of the project was on the students who were participating in the Parallel Program and to a lesser extent other students at risk of disengaging from school.

Findings

School staff is generally trained to focus on the student's academic progress and have a limited knowledge about and contact with outside agencies, programs and resources. It was hoped that the embedding of a Youth Worker within the school would complement and compensate for any gaps in the school staff experience, expertise and networks which would be required to achieve the project aims.

In hindsight, it appears the community development / engagement role assigned to the Youth Worker was compromised by a sustained demand from non-Parallel Program students for individual support and assistance.

The Youth Worker was drawn into early intervention work with students under 16; some of whom might be assessed as potential candidates for the Parallel Program. While this work undertaken by the Youth Worker was highly valuable in itself, from the perspective of the project aims, it was work that should probably have remained with the School Welfare Team.

The time and opportunity for the Youth Worker to document and establish clear processes and negotiate protocols with community agencies was extremely limited. The implementation of the project demonstrated that while there were good interpersonal connections between the Youth Worker and agency representatives, uncertainty around referral and support processes still remains as a barrier to providing effective support to the students and school.

This barrier suggests there is a need for greater engagement and involvement by agencies to develop agreed service engagement processes – this takes time and commitment from both the school and community agencies and the formation of relationships to a level that can facilitate this outcome.

Despite the limitations of the project and the difficulties which impacted on the capacity of the Youth Worker to achieve the aims of the project, the school is satisfied that the skills of a trained Youth Worker sitting alongside the Parallel Program enhanced and complemented the skills of teachers.

Parent engagement was difficult; particularly within the time frame. Information on the Parallel Program was sent to parents and where possible parents were engaged in the negotiations around their child moving into the Parallel Program. Once the student was in the program, most of the contact with Parents was by phone calls.

Outcomes

1. Improved student attendance and engagement in education and school community

Of those students who participated in the Parallel Program in 2013, 66.6% will continue to engage in education at Bundoora Secondary College in a full time capacity in 2014. Another 33.3% of the students whose situation at the end of 2013 indicated that they were not yet ready to return to mainstream classes will return or have been offered the opportunity to return to the Parallel Program.

Participation in Parallel Program provided the students with the 'time out' of mainstream classes and with the assistance of the Youth Worker begin the process of addressing critical issues and to improve the numbers and quality of referrals and engagement with local agencies. The Parallel Program also provided a "relief valve" for other school programs which may have been impacted or disrupted by the behaviour manifesting in students as a consequence of personal issues and distress.

2. Development of a parent/family engagement strategy

The Youth Worker reported that phone calls were made to parents, however, in the project timeframe; he was not able to develop a parent/family engagement strategy.

3. Documentation of alternative approach to purposeful education and 'real life' curriculum

Documentation is an ongoing practice with Bundoora Secondary College; however, there were examples of 'real life' learning experiences:

- The Youth Worker ran regular lunch time sessions where he and students prepared lunch, thus providing opportunities to learn important life skills in cooking and nutrition.
- With several students, the Youth Worker also planted vegetables in the school garden, providing opportunities to discuss the environment and gardening.

4. Documentation of procedures developed with community agencies

The Bundoora Secondary College Project did not have sufficient resources or time to establish and document processes with agencies. While anecdotal, the data demonstrates that having a Youth Worker embedded in the school did result in increased contact with and referrals to agencies, processes have not yet been discussed, streamlined and clarified.

For consideration

- Establish clear practices and protocols for referrals involving community expertise and resources – this could be facilitated by a Partnership Broker
- Schools and agencies should collaborate to develop a referral and engagement process that will have the first two or three sessions delivered locally; either within the school context or through outreach options negotiated with the young person
- Schools and community agencies should establish joint collaboration and reflection practices focused on ensuring the sustainability and currency of support processes and service delivery aimed at supporting vulnerable students
- When seeking to strengthen the support for vulnerable students, a whole of school approach should be implemented to ensure a more universal understanding about and buy in to the model - this could involve professional development for teachers
- Explore possible opportunities for working with one of the tertiary institutions Social / Youth Work programs to consider how tertiary students might be involved on an ongoing basis to engage and mentor at risk students
- Improve parent engagement at the school through a coordinated approach in consultation with parents, students and teachers.

Introduction

The Bundoora Secondary College Project was developed in response to recommendations of the 2012 *Banyule Nillumbik Under 16 Project Report*²; which was funded through the Banyule Nillumbik Youth Connections Consortia

The *Bundoora Secondary College Project 2013 - Exploring the Engagement of At-risk Students through Flexible Support and Program Delivery* was implemented in partnership with Bundoora Secondary College, Banyule City Council, BNLEN and Banyule Nillumbik Youth Connections Consortia (BNYC). A Youth Worker employed by Banyule Youth Services was (seconded for the project period) and based 2 days per week at Bundoora Secondary College from the commencement of Term 3 and worked closely with the Parallel Program Coordinator.

It was envisaged that the duration of the *Bundoora Secondary College Project 2013* would be one semester and that the Project would facilitate sustainable and transferable strategies to the school community and local agencies which focused on supporting vulnerable students and improving their engagement with education.

The *Bundoora Secondary College Project 2013* sought to build on and support the Parallel Program; which was implemented at Bundoora Secondary College at the start of 2013. The Parallel Program provides an alternative and flexible range of learning options for students identified as at risk of leaving school. While the Parallel Program has been provided predominantly to Year 10 at risk students it also includes severely at risk students from other year levels.

A key reason to utilise the Youth Worker provided via Banyule Youth Services was to maximise the pre-existing relationship between the Youth Worker and the school. It was perceived that this strategy would build on existing strengths, better facilitate the engagement of students into activities and leverage the opportunity to build sustainable relationships between the school and agencies as well as tapping into the worker's local networks and knowledge of services.

The utilisation of the Youth Worker was also implemented to prevent further pressure being applied to the schools resource base while the aims of the project were pursued.

² The 2012 *Banyule Nillumbik Under 16 Project* provides a measure of young people who are not engaged in school. The reasons contributing to disengagement are provided from the view of participating schools, those who work to support young people and from young people who have experienced school disengagement first hand

Background

Bundoora Secondary College - The Context

Bundoora Secondary College (www.bundoorasc.vic.edu.au) is a coeducational government secondary school, in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. The 2013 enrolment number is 459; representing 224 girls and 235 boys

The school has a *Student, Family Occupation Index* of 0.62, a *Language Background Other than English* of 32.0% and Indigenous students of 5.0% all of which are on the increase and a student attendance rate of 90%³

There are 40 full-time equivalent teaching staff and full-time equivalent, non-teaching staff of 10.3.

The school offers a comprehensive core program for Years 7 and 8 which opens to a core/elective program for Years 9 and 10 and broadens further in the senior years offering extensive VCE, VET and VCAL programs. The college has a range of co-curricular programs, including the Student Leadership Team (where we encourage student voice to contribute to improvements at the school), the Instrumental Music and Singing program, the College Debating Team, the College Drama Production and a full sports program to name a few. VET Enrolments in 2012 were 189.

From 2012 the College has been the lead school within the Northern Region to deliver certificate qualifications in Allied Health and Community Services.

The School Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value is 956 compared to the Average Australian ICSEA value 1000⁴

³ The student attendance rate is the total (aggregated) attendance rate across year levels 1–10. It refers to the number of actual student days attended during the period as a percentage of the number of possible student days attended during the period.

⁴ The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) was created by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) specifically to enable meaningful comparisons of National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) test achievement by students in schools across Australia. ICSEA should be interpreted with the assistance of the About ICSEA fact sheet and the Guide to understanding 2013 ICSEA values available at: www.acara.edu.au/verve/_resources/Guide_to_understanding_2013_ICSEA_values.pdf

Parallel program

The outcome Bundoora Secondary College is seeking from the Parallel Program is the retention of all students in education. Sue Muscat, the Principal has stated,

“The Parallel Program was initially designed as a “holding bay” or a place for students to go to access wellbeing and pathway support or to transition back to school after long absences. It was to reduce the impact of disrupted schooling on the classroom, but at the same time assist individual students to stay connected to the school.

These were typically students who would disappear from school or break the connection from school and no-one would look to repair the damage. Excluding students from the mainstream setting often results in students discontinuing their education. Providing an alternative response to their needs on site enhanced their sense of ‘belonging’ and worthiness. Students who are selected for the program have been identified as ‘at risk’, as being ‘disconnected’ from school for numerous reasons. This could be family trauma which has impacted upon their learning and /or attending school or for some students, not coping with the academic expectations of a particular year level. Students identified as ‘at risk’ of leaving school with no clear pathway.

The main emphasis of the program is to re-engage students in their education and to provide a unique opportunity to develop student’s confidence, skills and importantly their self-esteem. The program provides each student with an opportunity to improve their connectedness to school and provide each with an opportunity to build an improved routine in relation to their school experience. A varied curriculum is provided that enhances Literacy and Numeracy skills and Life Skills within each student. Student’s experience a range of opportunities through Industry links, ‘Guest speakers’ from outside organisations which aim to enhance student’s work readiness and employability skills. The Parallel Program aims to expose students to a variety of vocational pathways and experiences.”

In 2013, Bundoora Secondary College allocated a teacher to deliver the Parallel Program who also had a significant role in student welfare and as a VCAL teacher.

As part of the Parallel Program, a number of students do a school based traineeship with Eastern Food Share. (This was the only VET option provided to the Parallel Program students who did not come from a VCAL program).

It was initially intended that all the Parallel Program students would be doing a school-based Traineeships. However the school no longer has this policy as absences and/or behavioural issues impacted significantly on the completion rates of students. Where possible, students who came to the Parallel Program from the VCAL program still continued to do their TAFE day. The school-based Traineeships accounted for one day a week, on another two days students were expected to attend their Parallel Program classes and offered flexible options for the remainder of the week. Where students are transitioning back into the mainstream curriculum, they might start to gradually increase their participation in mainstream classes in addition to the two days.

The core curriculum consisted of numeracy and literacy, personal development work and community engagement type activities. The primary purpose of the activities was to keep the students engaged with the school. Outside of this curriculum, flexible arrangements were tailored to respond the needs and capacity of the individual students.

Bundoora Secondary College Project Aims

This Bundoora Secondary College Project 2013 Evaluation Report focuses on the Bundoora Secondary College Project, which was developed to assist the Bundoora Secondary College to enhance its Parallel Program.

The aims of the Bundoora Secondary College Project were to:

- Strengthen the existing Parallel Program at Bundoora Secondary College
- Build opportunities for at risk students
- Build sustainable school and community relationships
- Facilitate engagement of parents /guardians
- Facilitate connections to agencies that address the issues impacting on the students. E.g. YSAS for Drug and Alcohol, Health Services for Counselling, Berry Street and Reconnect for kids and families in conflict, etc.

The key objectives of the Project were to:

- Develop and maintain a strong successful model of parent and community engagement
- Effectively support students and work with their families to strengthen their engagement to school
- Facilitate effective engagement and consultation with parents, students and community agencies
- Identify students under the age of 16 years 'at risk' of disengagement; in consultation with Parallel Program Coordinator
- Map early intervention processes/strategies within the school and identify opportunities to improve engagement
- Identify significant barriers that prevent the students from fully engaging in their learning and engage external supports where necessary
- Increase linkages and partnerships between the school and external services and agencies
- Develop effective working relationship with school staff (leadership, teachers and welfare support staff) and external providers to support and advocate for those students
- Improve the professional learning of teaching and support staff about other alternative engagement programs and their practices

For the Principal of Bundoora Secondary College, the expectations around having the Youth Worker embedded in the schools for 2 days per week were to:

- Support the well-being response for the students in this program
- Bring the Youth Worker's experience of working with critical adolescent issues to the school
- Bring the Youth Worker's knowledge and agency contacts to expand the access to services to support these "highly at risk" students
- Build the school's capacity to be responsive to the needs of our students
- Support the Parallel Program teacher/coordinator
- Provide a male mentor and role model for the male students

Having the Youth Worker at Bundoora Secondary College offered something different to the school. I.e. Welfare staff were teacher trained with an academic focus, they have less knowledge about external agencies and programs than the Youth Worker and there is a need to address issues of student wellbeing which are outside the school's core business and current capacity.

The Bundoora Secondary College Project sought to achieve:

- Improved student attendance and engagement in education and the school community
- Development of a parent/family engagement strategy
- Documentation of alternative approach to purposeful education and 'real life' curriculum
- Documentation of procedures developed with community agencies

Management of the Project

An Advisory Group was established to oversee the project and to develop and implement an evaluation framework for the achievement of outcomes listed above. The members of the Group consisted of the Principal of Bundoora Secondary College, the Parallel Program Coordinator, a BNLLEN Senior Partnership Broker, a Youth Worker and the Team Leader and Service Development Officer from Banyule Youth Services, and the Inner Northern Youth Connections Consortium (NMIT) Operations Manager and Contract Manager. Meetings were chaired by a BNLLEN Senior Partnership Broker.

The Advisory Group was scheduled to meet monthly however, conflicting working hours and scheduled holidays limited their capacity to meet.

Evaluation Methodology

In order to assess the achievement of the outcomes, a range of data and observations was collected by the Youth Worker and the Parallel Program Coordinator relating to students, community agencies, parents/guardians and school staff. Refer to Attachments 1 to 5 for more detail.

Data collected included:

1. *Student profile at commencement of the program*; used to records student initials, gender, Year level, age and any general comment regarding the reasons for the student's participation in the Parallel Program. (**Attachment 1**)
2. Fortnightly record of contacts with students, agencies, parents etc. plus space for general comments/anecdotes as appropriate (**Attachment 2**)
3. *Student Profiles – Progressive outcomes* that were to be completed over duration of the project (**Attachment 3**)
4. *Student Profile on Completion of Project* (**Attachment 4**)
5. *Community Organisation Profile*; completed over duration of the project (**Attachment 5**)

Data was discussed at Advisory Group meetings and this report was completed by the Senior Partnership Broker and the Youth Connections Contract Manager in consultation with Advisory Group members.

The Principal of Bundoora Secondary College and the Banyule Council Youth Worker were interviewed and information from these interviews also informs this evaluation report.

Limitations/issues around data collections

There were significant issues that impacted on the data collection – these include:

1. A project timeframe which was too short

The aims and objectives of the project were ambitious and hindsight now confirms that the project's duration of one semester was too short to realistically achieve all the project aims and the Advisory Group had underestimated the time it would take to undertake all tasks required to complete the project.

While there was much to learn from the work done by the Youth Worker, it is important to note that there was insufficient time to achieve many of the key objectives in particular:

- Family/parental engagement did not take place and therefore no strategy was developed within the one semester time frame
- Linkages with agencies have not been documented nor process and protocols discussed

2. Recording of data

Data was to be recorded regularly, however, with the day to day urgency of dealing with students much of the actual data recording happened towards the end of the project – this affected the work of the Advisory Group which then relied on verbal feedback during the meetings. Data record sheets were submitted at the end of the project.

3. Lack of buy-in from agencies

The Youth Worker reported that agencies were often slow to respond to his calls and emails and time was spent in following up information and/or the arrangement of appointments for students.

4. High needs of other students not in Parallel

On a day to day basis, the Youth Worker was often required to assist with the immediate needs of students, thus limiting his available time for other elements of the work such as engagement with parents.

Fortnightly contact records indicate that the majority of the Youth Worker's time was spent with other students.

Profiles and outcomes are shown for students participating in Parallel Program however; the Youth Worker reported that many Parallel Program students did not want to meet him individually

5. Lack of clear processes and allocation of space for work of Youth Worker

Albeit over ambitious, the project objectives were clear, but the achievement of these objectives was hindered by the lack of a clear implementation framework. For example, follow up discussions with the Youth Worker indicate on a day to day basis, he was located in the Student Welfare Coordinator's office. The Youth Worker felt this contributed to teachers developing a view that his role was an extension of the Student Welfare Coordinator's role and that he would see all students in need.

Data Analysis

Student profiles

The basic profiles of students participating in the Parallel Program were recorded at the commencement of the project; at the start of Term 3 and added to as more detail became evident.

18 students enrolled in the Parallel Program during 2013; 3 females and 15 males. The year levels included one Year 9 student, two Year 11 students, thirteen Year 10 students and the Year level of two students was not entered on the data sheet.

The students who were selected for the Parallel Program were the ones on the end of the “at risk” continuum. The profiles of the majority of Parallel Program students indicate a long history of personal and family trauma, family breakdown; substance abuse, carer responsibilities, large absences or irregular attendance and student suspensions also feature strongly among the cohort.

Family Status:

- 8 students live in single parent households
- 3 live with a grandparent or other family member
- 4 young people live with both parents
- 1 young person alternates between each parent
- 2 students had experienced loss of a parent
- 1 student had experienced the loss of both parents
- 1 student lives with a partner and has a 10 month old baby and another baby due in 2014
- Family situation of one student – not known
- 1 student also has carer responsibilities for twin siblings- mother struggles emotionally and financially.
- 4 students have experienced periods of ‘couch surfing’, one of those was out of home for 6 months and did not attend school (this was prior to participation in the program)

Major “at risk” factors:

- 7 students reported cannabis or alcohol use
- 3 students reported a parent with drug and/or alcohol issues
- 3 students had significant anger management issues
- 1 student has low literacy/numeracy levels, which impacted on educational outcomes
- 1 student was assessed with Low IQ and recommended to attend a Special School, parents reluctant
- 1 had anxiety issues (it is suspected there are more students, but there was no formal identification)

DHS and/or other agency involvement:

- 10 students with family and/or individual history of the DHS / other agency involved, 7 of these were current
- 1 Student was involved with the police/court following personal/physical trauma and hospitalisation

Note: despite being at risk; most students in the Parallel Program had no current connection to community based support.

School:

- 5 students had a history of school suspensions

The Youth Worker also recorded contacts with 15 students in addition to those in the Parallel Program – these students were mostly Year 8 and 9 students. The profiles of these students were not recorded as this was an unexpected aspect and was not part of the initial brief.

For many students being in the Parallel Program was sufficient to keeping them connected to the school. The Youth Worker reported that many Parallel students had indicated that they did not want further assistance despite being identified as ‘at risk’.

The tables below summarise the student contacts for (a) Parallel Program Students and (b) Non-Parallel Program Students. (See **Appendix 2** for details of the Youth Worker/student contacts template)

a) Parallel Program Students Contacts (Total students = 18)		
Incidental	Individual	Group
2	1 student X 3 appointments 1 student x 4 appointments	1 X 5 sessions
Total number of 5 Parallel Student who met with the Youth Worker = 27.7% of Parallel group		

b) Non Parallel Program Student Contacts (Total students = 15)			
Incidental	Individual	Group Participation	Other meetings
4	1 student x 1 appointment 1 student x 3 appointments 1 student x 4 appointments	1 student x 1 group sessions 1 student x 4 group sessions 4 students x 6 group sessions 1 student x 8 group sessions	1 x school & parent meeting
Total number of 15 students who met with the Youth Worker			

Parents

Parents or guardians are invited to meet with the Parallel Program Coordinator. Initially the school required parent meetings before students were accepted into the Parallel Program but this expectation was stopped due to lack of parental attendance. The Principal indicated that *'parents are keen to keep their child within the Bundoora Secondary College community as they have established friendships and social networks.'* Once a student was in the program contact with Parents was mainly achieved via phone calls.

The student profiles suggest that many students experienced family issues and in some cases the Principal *felt that 'The absence of concerned parents is often a factor in a student being in the Parallel Program'.*

While parental engagement has been a key aim of the project, it has been demonstrated that providing successful Interventions for students can sometimes break down when the interventions are dependent on family input. Families are not necessarily able or capable of following through to support students in the Parallel Program. For example, where families are dysfunctional, or absent or where the student is the carer or is couch surfing or the parents/guardians are highly uncomfortable entering the school environment.

Where parents can be engaged, students, parents/guardians meet with the Parallel Coordinator and the Parallel Program is explained in detail. It is explained that the emphasis of the program is on providing support for the student; the 'best fit' for what the student requires at the time and it is a program to support the student because they are not coping with the "mainstream" program.

Students often don't have a safe space at home. A challenge for the Parallel Program is to create a 'physical and emotional safe space at school.

Work Undertaken by the Youth Worker

The Youth Worker who was based in the school 2 days per week over the duration of the Project was chosen in part because he had pre-existing links with Bundoora Secondary College.

The worker met with students both individually and in groups, established and documented links with local community agencies, accompanied students on visits to agencies or training and established relationships with the parents of participating students.

Meetings with students ranged from informal chats during lunch breaks to structured appointments to discuss particular issues. The Youth Worker provided individual and small group support to students on issues ranging from sibling conflict and parentification through to respectful relationships and mental health and wellbeing.

On numerous occasions the Youth Worker worked with students from the Parallel Program to prepare and cook lunch for the rest of the class. This provided the opportunity for students to learn important life skills (cooking and nutrition), feel a sense of accomplishment and sharing and to build a relationship with the youth worker through shared experiences.

In addition to this cooking program the Youth Worker also cooked with an individual senior school student who was experiencing isolation from his family and as a consequence significant financial distress. Without the cooking with the youth worker this student did not eat during the school day.

The Youth Worker donated vegetable seedling to the school and worked with 2 at risk students to plant them in the school vegetable garden. This activity lead on to discussions with Parallel Program students about the environment and gardening and they identified dissatisfaction with some of the garden beds at the school and expressed a desire to address this. The youth worker supported the teacher to apply for a Banyule City Council Environmental Grant to rejuvenate some of the school gardens including the veggie garden. Due to receiving the funding late in 2013 this project will now be undertaken in spring 2014.

Activities for Students in the Parallel Program

The Parallel Program included activities delivered by school staff; including the Youth Worker and also through the utilisation of staff and activities provided through the cooperation of external organisations.

Internal Activities:

- Literacy/Numeracy on Tuesday
- Projects/Guest speakers on Thursday
- Breakfast each morning (time to catch up and chat)
- Students provided with course counselling for 2014 end of Term 3
- End of Term 3 celebration lunch
- Mindfulness and meditation practice trialled with some success
- Students are provided with lunches

Activities Provided with the Support of External Organisations:

a) Hands – on activities

- Barista and Safe Food Handling Certs
- Jets Studio Tour
- Construction of a new Indigenous garden area at BSC – To be completed spring 2014.
- NMIT Tasters/tour of NMIT Term 4 (Personal Protective Equipment may be supplied by Youth Connections. Students will attend on Thursdays, except for week 3; which will be a Tuesday)
 - Engineering-(Mechanical)
 - Engineering -(Fabrication)
 - Bricklaying

- Carpentry
- Watsonia Army Barracks visit (Apprenticeships)
- Watsonia Traders-Tyre painting
- Youth Space at Heidelberg Hub (Youth Connections. EFocus, Employment Network)

b) Guest Speakers

- Youth Connections
- Time Out Project Officer - a talk about Centrelink, housing support
- Alcohol and Other Drugs Worker- harm minimization (Banyule Health Service)
- Berry Street Housing Program (Term 3)

c) Other

- Berry Street Housing Program (Term 3)
- Youth & Advocacy Support Service (Term 4)
- Headspace, Collingwood visit (Term 4) - Visit to Agency
- Melbourne Youth Support Service.

Case Studies

The following case studies demonstrate the multiple and complex issues that students in Parallel Program are experiencing.

Case Study 1: Female Year 10 Student:

Background:

- Started the year in VCAL but did not attend school
- Volatile relationship with mother/siblings past drug misuse
- Lives predominantly with Grandmother in outer northern suburbs
- Entered the Parallel Program 1st Semester, attending regularly up until she had a falling out with her friendship group and did not return. School Staff then conducted home visits to the mother and grandmother; resulting in the student returning to school in the latter part of second semester
- Referred to Youth Connections but did not meet with the worker
- Refused a referral to Youth Worker

Outcomes:

- Student's attendance improved
- Participated in a TAFE Try a Trade and really enjoyed it
- Attended the Year 10 Formal VCAL classes, Parallel Program Christmas
- Completed Literacy Journal at home and school
- Has enrolled in a VET course for 2014 and will be offered an Intermediate VCAL place

Case Study 2: Male Year 10 Student:

Background:

- Chronic school refuser since Year 8
- Regular drug misuse
- Very withdrawn, quiet, didn't engage with other students, most friends outside of school
- Lives with mother and only child
- The family has had engagement with a number of services over the years, including Berry St

Outcome:

- Did not engage with the Parallel Program
- Looked at DVLC VCAL Program for 2014. He liked the programs, small class sizes and no uniform, but chose to remain at Bundoora Secondary College in 2014
- A referral was provided to Youth Connections, and he was to meet with a worker at the NMIT Try a Trade session. He did not stay to meet the worker. Has not responded/met with the worker since
- Made a time to speak with Careers Counsellor-did not attend.
- To enrol in a VET course for 2014 - Not interested in a trade is interested in Music
- In Parallel Program in 2014
- Regular contact with mother by phone

Case Study 3: Female Year 10 Student**Background:**

- Lives with mother and 3 siblings (younger sibling recently diagnosed with Autism)
- Chronic school refuser since Year 8
- Came into Parallel Program from Mainstream Year 10 as not attending class
- Difficulty maintaining friendships which impacts on attending school

Outcomes:

- Attendance improved
- Engaged well with other students and developed positive relationship
- Enjoyed the smaller class size
- Attended and enjoyed the NMIT Try a Trade sessions
- Maintained writing Journal both at home and school
- Attended the 'Be the Hero Program' one day per week over 4 weeks
- Has enrolled in a VET course for 2014 and offered a place in Intermediate VCAL in 2014

Outcomes

1. *Improved student attendance and engagement in education and school community*

At the completion of the project, the following outcomes were recorded for students in the Parallel Program:

Type of outcome (Intentions for 2014)	Number of students
Senior VCAL with VCE English	1
Return to Parallel with aim of transferring to VCAL	3
Return to Parallel	1
Offer to return to Parallel but no response at end of 2013	2
VCAL	1
Repeat VCAL	1
Senior VCAL	2
Intermediate VCAL	5
Intermediate/Senior VCAL	3
Total	18

In 2014, 66.6% of the 2013 Parallel Program students will continue to engage in education at Bundoora Secondary College, in a full time mainstream capacity. 33.3% of the 2013 Parallel Program students who were not yet ready to return to mainstream classes were offered the opportunity to return to the Parallel Program in 2014.

Participation in the Parallel Program provided the students with 'time out' from the mainstream classes to address their barriers to engagement and to increase their connection to local agencies and programs.

The School Principal believes that the program has resulted in the retention of at least 12 students who in the past would have been lost to education just because that would have been the road of least resistance.

2. Development of a parent/family engagement strategy

The Youth Worker reported that phone calls were made to parents, however in the project timeframe; he was not able to develop a parent/family engagement strategy. There is evidence that in a number of cases this may be extremely challenging and may not always be an option.

3. Documentation of alternative approach to purposeful education and 'real life' curriculum

Documentation is an ongoing practice at Bundoora Secondary College; however, it is relevant to note here following 'real life' learning experiences for some students:

- one student commenced volunteer work placement with Banyule City Council Depot Services
- one student working with Banyule City Council playground maintenance
- one student had a very successful work experience with Banyule City Council

4. Documentation of procedures developed with community agencies

The Bundoora Secondary College Project did not have sufficient resources or time to establish and document processes with agencies. While anecdotal, the data demonstrates that having a Youth Worker embedded in the school did result in increased contact with and referrals to agencies, processes have not yet been streamlined and clarified.

Further work is needed to develop agreed processes based on consultation to ensure student access to services is both timely and appropriate.

The Bundoora Project did, however highlight the issues faced by students seeking support and the level of demands on schools. Stronger relationships between the school and community agencies could do much to address the needs of these students.

Findings

School staff is generally trained to focus on the student's academic progress and have a limited knowledge about and contact with outside agencies, programs and resources. It was hoped that the embedding of a Youth Worker within the school would complement and compensate for any gaps in the school staff experience, expertise and networks which would be required to achieve the project aims.

In hindsight, it appears the community development / engagement role assigned to the Youth Worker was compromised by a sustained demand from non-Parallel Program students for individual support and assistance.

The Youth Worker was drawn into early intervention work with students under 16; some of whom might be assessed as potential candidates for the Parallel Program. While this work undertaken by the Youth Worker was highly valuable in itself, from the perspective of the project aims, it was work that should probably have remained with the School Welfare Team.

The Youth Worker commenced at the start of Semester 2, however, it needs to be noted that the total time the Youth Worker was able to work with the students was limited to a period of 16 weeks as a total as 2.5 weeks of leave were taken and the Parallel Program ended 5th December.

The time available to negotiate, document and establish clear processes and protocols with community agencies was extremely limited.

Each week the Youth Worker provided regular Anger/ Behaviour Management group support to both students in and external to the Parallel Program. In addition, the Youth Worker would be involved in one-to-one individual support and engaged in the process of linking individual students to support.

An assumption made in formalising the project was that Youth Workers outside of the school would have greater connectivity to services and programs than perhaps some of the school staff. The Parallel Program Coordinator observed that a Youth Worker would have better understanding and connection to external services, programs and expertise and the Principal agreed. The implementation of the project demonstrated that while there were good interpersonal connections, there was still uncertainty around referral and support processes.

There is a lack of services located in reasonable proximity to Bundoora Secondary College. I.e. the nearest *Headspace* service provider is located in Collingwood or Glenroy and their policy in 2013 was not to provide outreach services. The Alcohol and other Drugs Counsellor available through Banyule Community Health has a very limited capacity for outreach and again the nearest YSAS provider which is based in Fitzroy does not do outreach. YNOT appears to be absent from the Banyule area.

There is a significant challenge in getting the young people from the Parallel program to engage with services and the lack of outreach is very prohibitive. The Youth Worker identified the need for young people to be engaged in an environment where they feel safe and comfortable; especially with the initial contact. Most of the students at Bundoora Secondary College people don't know the organisations delivering services and are unfamiliar with Glenroy/Collingwood/Fitzroy areas and thus won't travel there. Where outreach is available, limiting the option to a school setting can again prevent access for some young people; particularly if the young person is a chronic school refuser. The occasional use of a unique outreach setting negotiated with the student can be useful; such as meeting a young person at a cafe or McDonalds.

These difficulties suggest the need for greater involvement by agencies to develop agreed service engagement processes – this takes time and commitment from both the school and community agencies.

The Youth Worker found the two elements of the project demanding and stated that *“It was particularly difficult to take the project from working with the students to the next stage of engaging with parents and teachers with the limited time available”*.

Implementing the project presented difficulties which were not anticipated. For example the work space provided for the Youth Worker was near the Parallel Program space. Easy access to the Youth Worker meant that there were numerous ad hoc and incidental visits and requests for assistance by students who were not in the Parallel Program. Students and indeed some teachers saw the Youth Worker as part of the welfare team and therefore perceived he was available to all and at any time.

The limited lead-in time to the project meant that implementation of the program was rushed and did not include sufficient communication to school staff about the Bundoora Project, its aims and the role of the Youth Worker. The lack of clear boundaries and protocols impacted on the capacity of the Youth Worker to focus on the aims of the project.

The Youth Worker was drawn into early intervention work with students under 16, some of whom might be assessed as potential candidates for the Parallel Program. While this work undertaken by the Youth Worker was highly valuable in itself, from the perspective of the project aims, it was work that should probably have remained with the School Welfare Team

Despite the limitations of the project and difficulties impacting on the capacity of the Youth Worker to achieve the aims of the project, the school is satisfied that the skills of a trained Youth Worker sitting alongside the Parallel Program enhanced and complemented the skills of teachers. Many of the students assisted by the youth Worker in 2013 have continued to maintain a relationship with the Youth Worker in 2014.

The Youth Worker observed that many of the young people in the Parallel Program chose not to engage on an individual support basis, likely because they believed there were no significant problems. He perceived that issues of alcohol and other drug use, family dysfunction, mental health and wellbeing etc. had become normalised in their minds or in some cases, they had lost trust in any worker and so choose instead to confide in and rely on their peers.

Parent engagement was difficult; particularly within the time frame. Information on the Parallel Program was sent to parents and where possible parents were engaged in the negotiations around their child moving into the Parallel Program. Once the student was in the program, most contact with Parents was mainly achieved via phone calls.

The Youth Worker observed *“some of the parents will never engage; it will require a lot of work and you need to know the student before you can engage the parents. The Parents may in many instances require and would benefit from significant assistance, but even if this need and support can be identified, it is not the role of the school to do that”*

The Youth Worker further observed *“There is a clear gap in the facilitating of the type of assistance for the families that may also assist the student. Unless the support can be provided for the family as a whole it is difficult to get to the stage of addressing the student’s educational needs”*

Factors contributing towards the success of the Project

A number of factors can be identified as value adding to the overall well being of students who were assisted by the Youth Worker:

- Having a male is a benefit in engaging the males in the program. Most participants in the Parallel Program are males.
- Allowing for informal/incidental contact worked well in creating an environment that encouraged engagement.
- The mindfulness and meditation sessions provided different types of opportunities for students to reflect on behaviour and attitudes.
- Both consistency and longevity of the Youth Worker and student relationship is a significant factor in the success of the project

- The Bundoora Secondary College benefitted from a prior relationship with the Youth Worker.

For Consideration

- Establish clear practices and protocols for referrals involving community expertise and resources – this could be facilitated by a Partnership Broker
- Schools and agencies should collaborate to develop a referral and engagement process that will have the first two or three sessions delivered locally; either within the school context or through outreach options negotiated with the young person
- Schools and community agencies should establish joint collaboration and reflection practices focused on ensuring the sustainability and currency of support processes and service delivery aimed at supporting vulnerable students
- When seeking to strengthen the support for vulnerable students, a whole of school approach should be implemented to ensure a more universal understanding about and buy in to the model - this could involve professional development for teachers
- Explore possible opportunities for working with one of the tertiary institutions Social / Youth Work programs to consider how tertiary students might be involved on an ongoing basis to engage and mentor at risk students
- Improve parent engagement at the school through a coordinated approach in consultation with parents, students and teachers.

Attachments

Summary:

1. *Attachment 1: Student profile at the commencement of the program;* used to record student initials, gender, Year level, age and any general comment regarding the reasons for the student's participation in the Parallel Program.
2. *Attachment 2:* Fortnightly record of contacts with students, agencies, parents, etc. plus space for general comments/anecdotes as
3. *Attachment 3: Student Profiles – Progressive outcomes* that were to be completed over the duration of the project
4. *Attachment 4: Student Profile on Completion of Project*
5. *Attachment 5: Community Organisation Profile;* completed over the duration of the project

Attachment 1. Student Profiles at commencement

	Student (list initials)	M or F	Year level	Age	General comment on reasons in Parallel program
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
17					

Attachment 2. Fortnightly activity log – Bundoora SC Project Fortnight commencing.....

Contacts	In Para	Not in Para	Type of contact <i>egg phone, meeting, letter, email</i>	Nature of contact <i>egg information sharing, discussion of student or possible opportunities, group work with students or other</i>	Issues/general comments <i>if appropriate</i>
Students <i>(initials only)</i>					
Community agencies					
Parents <i>(list initial of student)</i>					
Other					

Attachment 3. Student Profiles - Progressive outcomes

	Student (list initials)	M or F	Year level	Age	Student progressive outcomes <i>egg work experience, referral Youth Connections, volunteer work, participated in community project (add others as appropriate)</i>
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					
16					
19					

Attachment 4. Student Profiles at completion of project

	Student (list initials)	M or F	Year level	Age	Student outcome – intention for 2014 <i>e.g. return to class, continue in program, commence employment, Youth Connections or other</i>
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					
16					
17					

Attachment 5. Community organisation profile

Name Community Organisation:
Brief description:
Names of Key Contact/s:
Contact details:
What they can do:
Process in place:
Nature of relationship:

Name Community Organisation:
Brief description:
Names of Key Contact/s:
Contact details:
What they can do:
Process in place
Nature of relationship