

“The Space In-between”

Future Policy Directions for Youth at Risk

*A paper developed by the Youth Connections National Network
highlighting the needs of youth at risk and future policy directions for the
Youth Connections program.*





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Executive Summary

We are pleased to present to you the Youth Connections National Network paper, *The Space In-Between – Future Policy Directions for Youth at Risk*. Youth Connections providers are experts at delivering support services to the most disadvantaged, disengaged and vulnerable young Australians. On behalf of Youth Connections providers, we therefore make this contribution to the policy debate on young people at risk.

The paper makes two key recommendations.

- The Federal Government should provide a ***national specialist transition and engagement service*** for disengaged and disadvantaged young people who need support to successfully transition to employment or further training. This service should sit in-between traditional schooling and employment assistance services, demonstrating government understanding of the particular needs of young people and representing a commitment to investing in the future of young Australians. It should be youth focused, building foundational employment skills as well as capturing and developing the aspirations of young people.
- In addition to a national transition and engagement service for young adults, there needs to be a specialist youth service based in the community, to complement and walk ‘side by side’ schools during the implementation phase of the *Gonski Review* recommendations. This ***reconnect to education service*** needs to be flexible enough to provide services to disengaged young people in the community and support them to reenter an educational setting.

Young people who do not transition successfully from school to further education or employment are the most vulnerable demographic in society. High youth unemployment rates and over representation in under-employment means young people aged 15-24, who are disengaged from education and are not in training or employment, face a bleak future of financial distress, increased likelihood of health and mental health issues, long term welfare dependence and increased likelihood of involvement in the criminal justice system.

The Youth Connections National Network believes it is fiscally and socially responsible and advantageous for Government to resource this cohort of young people with support that is easily and universally accessible, to prepare them for their future, building their skills to enter meaningful employment.

Providing support for this group of young people is a sound investment for Australia’s future.

Gerrie Mitra
Chair
Youth Connections National Network

The Space In-between – Future Policy Directions for Youth at Risk

This paper has been prepared by the Youth Connections National Network (YCNN) with input from Youth Connections (YC) providers across Australia. Youth Connections providers are community based organisations that successfully tendered for the Youth Connections Program in 2009. YCNN is a representative group of peer selected providers representing each state and territory, covering metropolitan, regional and remote locations.

Youth Connections providers are experts at delivering support services to the most disadvantaged, disengaged and vulnerable young Australians. Employing qualified and experienced staff, they work in a local setting, using partnerships and long term relationships to broker sustainable outcomes for young people who face significant barriers to their education and personal development. This includes young people in the juvenile justice system, those with poly substance use, dysfunctional family settings including involvement with child protection systems, complex mental health issues, language barriers, poor foundational skills and social isolation.

This paper highlights the precarious situation young people face when they no longer regularly participate in education, and what needs to be done to support this group of young people in the future. It also outlines how Youth Connections Providers see the current program; highlighting strengths, as well as addressing limitations.

As part of the data collection for this paper, YCNN facilitated a series of ‘Shout Out’ workshops across the nation. These workshops gave Youth Connections participants the opportunity to comment on their experience with the program and on education more generally. The paper therefore also includes the voice of young people in its findings.



Youth Connections Program Overview

Youth Connections is a federally funded program administered by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). Youth Connections is delivered in 113 regions across Australia, by 65 Providers, covering every state and territory. Service delivery is characterised as flexible, individualised case management to assist young people who are disengaged, or at risk of disengagement from education. Youth Connections providers also implement outreach and re-engagement activities for young people in the community and strengthen ‘wrap around’ services in their regions so that young people can access better support.

Since the commencement of the program in 2010, 54,206 young people have received case management assistance through Youth Connections.

State	All YC Participants	Culturally and linguistically diverse	Humanitarian Refugee	Indigenous Australians
ACT	770	58	32	81
NSW	20015	1505	234	4466
NT	1089	230	4	846
QLD	10005	646	65	2136
SA	3148	75	45	463
TAS	1529	18	22	174
VIC	12023	872	352	684
WA	5627	294	60	1309
Total	54206	3698	814	10159

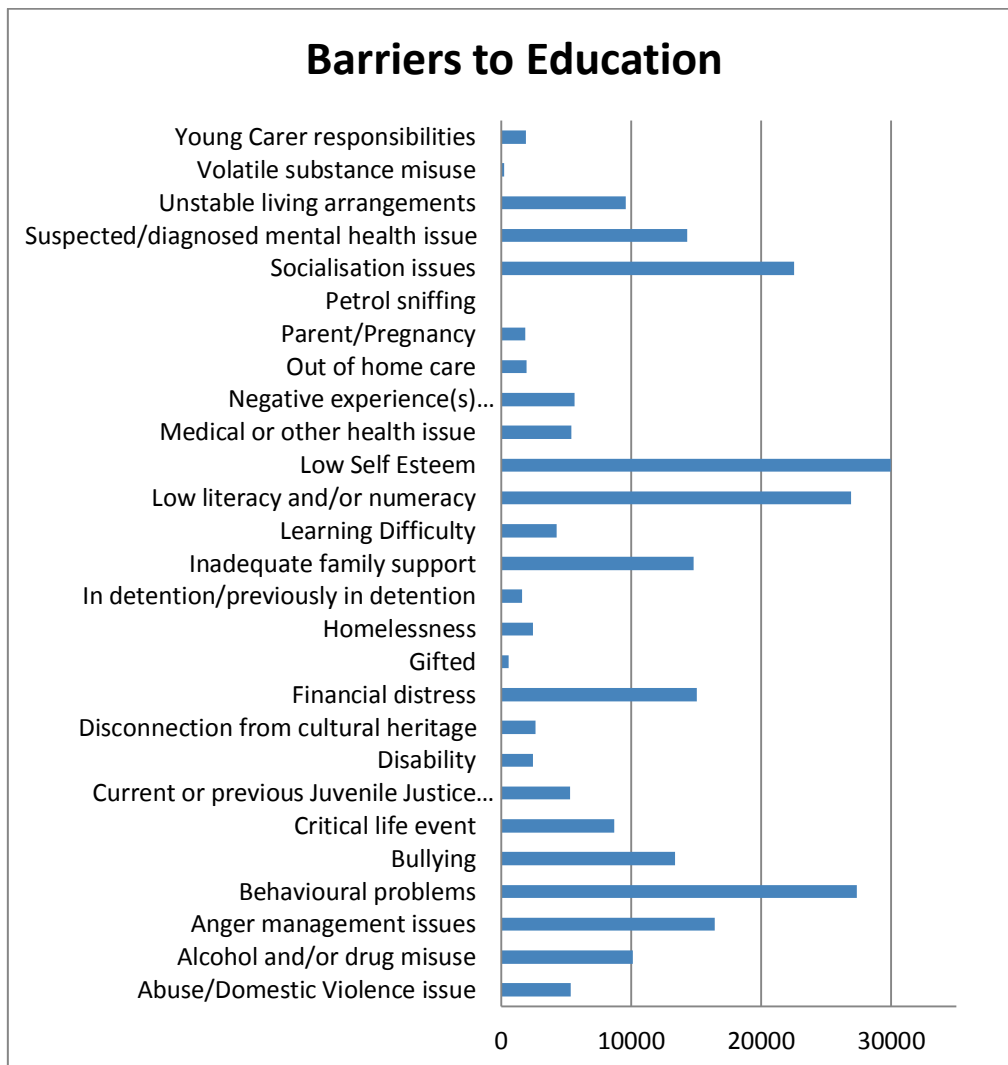
(DEEWR data for 1 Jan 2010 to 31 Aug 2012)

Youth Connections clients are defined as those who have disconnected or are at risk of disconnecting from education or training and therefore not attaining Year 12 or equivalent, and of not making a successful transition to further study, training or employment.

These are young people with multiple and complex barriers to engagement, who are highly vulnerable because of their ‘at risk’ state. Generally, a number of the following characteristics are present:

- *Mental health issues, both diagnosed and undiagnosed, including depression, anxiety, self-harming and psychotic behaviors*
- *Homelessness or at risk of homelessness (including couch surfing)*
- *Family breakdown involving lack of support or a crisis*
- *Drug and alcohol addiction*
- *Criminal behavior and contact with the juvenile justice system*
- *Low educational achievement (learning difficulties) and negative educational or social experiences such as bullying*
- *Young people living in intergenerational poverty and unemployment and those from a low socio-economic background*

The graph below demonstrates the barriers to education as identified by Youth Connections clients.



(DEEWR Barriers to Education Data – August 2012)

Despite Youth Connections young people presenting with complex and often multiple barriers to education, 37,033 (68%) of participants have achieved a progressive outcome. Approximately 6,300 (62%) of Indigenous participants recorded a progressive outcome. A progressive outcome recognises that a young person has made significant progress in addressing their barriers to full engagement in education.

From 1 January 2010 to 31 August 2012, 30,408 (56%) young people participating in the Youth Connections program recorded a final outcome. Of the Indigenous participants, 4,641 (46%) recorded a final outcome. A final outcome represents re-engagement or sustained improvement in a young person's engagement with education, training or employment.¹

¹ DEEWR Statistical Data 1/1/2010 – 31/8/2012

Context

Youth Connections is one of a succession of programs funded by the Federal Government to support young people in transition. Prior to 2010, the Youth Pathways Program provided intensive transition support to at risk young people. Youth Pathways was part of the Careers Advice Australia (CAA) initiative; a suite of programs designed to improve successful transitions for all young people.

In the current environment of an aging population and an increasing focus on productivity and skills development; the need for all young Australians to successfully transition to the workforce and make the most of their abilities is critical. In September 2012, 249,400 young people aged 15-24 were seeking employment². This figure represents 37.2% of Australians currently looking for employment.

In recent years, the school leaving age has risen nationally and there is a concerted effort to increase the numbers of young people who achieve Year 12 or equivalent qualification. Despite this retention policy, there are still a significant number of young people who leave school early, without basic skills in literacy and numeracy, and often with complex social and emotional barriers to successful engagement in learning or working.

Transitioning to employment

Young people who have not successfully completed their education face the prospect of looking for secure employment and a career pathway with limited skills in a challenging economic climate. Youth unemployment is high and the casualisation/underemployment of the workforce impacts on young people more significantly than the general population.

In September 2011, of the 814,700 part time workers looking for more hours of employment, approximately one third were aged 15-24 years of age³. Generally, the transition to employment occurs at around the age of 18. The service response for those needing assistance in finding employment is *Job Services Australia*, a highly regulated, compliance driven employment services program.



It's known that young people are still developing physically, socially and emotionally until well into their twenties.⁴ In order to develop and make successful transitions, young people need to take risks in a safe environment where they can learn from their mistakes. They need support and guidance to navigate the pathway into adulthood. With family breakdown at high levels, this

“This has been a particularly valuable service ... we can see the significant difference it has made. The ongoing individual support provided has been highly beneficial in promoting more positive self-esteem and providing them with practical strategies for dealing with difficult situations.”

Emma, Teacher, Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School

² 6291.0.55.001 - Labour Force, Australia, Detailed - Electronic Delivery, Sep 2012

³ ABS “Underemployed Workers” September 2011. 6265.0

⁴ (Society of Neuroscience http://www.sfn.org/skins/main/pdf/annual_report/fy2011/teenage.pdf)

transition phase is even more difficult for those young people without a stable home and family environment.

YCNN does not believe that *Job Services Australia* alone offers the necessary specialist support and assistance young people need to successfully create a career pathway and transition to secure employment. A separate specialist transition and engagement service is needed for disengaged and disadvantaged young people to support them in preparing to enter the employment market, which is creative, engaging and flexible. Young people need a program that complements but is distinct from JSA, using a different model and approach.

Burringurrah June 2011

Gonski Review of Funding for Schools

The *Review of Funding for Schools* chaired by David Gonski (“the Gonski Review”) created a new policy framework to examine the capability of schools to prepare young people for their role in society. With legislation currently before Parliament, changes are expected to be far reaching with a lengthy implementation phase. Such global changes will take considerable time before outcomes can be accurately analysed and policy reviewed.



YCNN believes therefore that there needs to be a federally funded service for young people at risk which walks ‘side by side’ with the Gonski Review recommendations. There will still be a need to ensure that specialist services are provided in the community for young people who have disengaged from the traditional school setting. Such services will recognise the capacity of the community sector to provide support in partnership with schools, to find those young people who have dropped out, and to support them to reconnect with learning and their community.

“What an invaluable resource, positive, relevant and engaging! ... a wealth of knowledge and the case management provides students with a positive role model and support network.”

Kristie Ghossein, Assistant Principal, Lawrence Hargrave School NSW

During the implementation phase of the recommendations in the Gonski Review, YCNN recognises that flexible Youth Connections program delivery needs to exist in order to complement the planned recommendations and ensure that there is not a duplication of services, nor a gap in service delivery. Should the Gonski Review recommendations not be implemented in the short term, the future shape of the Youth Connections program, as discussed in this paper, will need reconsidering.

Youth Connections Program Strengths

Independent evidence indicates that the Youth Connections program has been highly successful in achieving its stated aims. A comprehensive evaluation conducted by Dandolo Partners⁵, Personal Wellbeing Index analysis by RMIT University⁶ and the Brotherhood of St Laurence⁷ 'Building Relationships for Better Outcomes' Report all emphasise the success of Youth Connections. It is important to acknowledge and build on the strengths and success of the Youth Connections program in a future policy setting.

When assessing the strengths of the program and the factors contributing to its success, the following six key points were identified by providers:

1. Case Management Approach

The provision of individualised support which is flexible and not time limited is a key factor in the success of the program. Community based case management fosters the opportunity to build rapport in a supportive environment. Case management provides an effective, comprehensive and timely assessment of the young person and their circumstances, leading to the development of an individual plan with specific steps agreed upon to reach their goals.

Independence of the support worker is seen as important and attractive for this group of young people. Knowing that this worker is not from their school or other institution, where they may already have burnt their bridges, allows for fuller disclosure and the opportunity to start again. The holistic approach of case management under Youth Connections looks at the whole person and takes all factors into consideration when developing strategies to address barriers, thus supporting young people to achieve their full potential.

"..because you have been there for me when I needed a chat and help to get through things that I wouldn't of been able by myself,"
Mikaela 15 WA

"Students who find it difficult to engage in their education have connected with someone from outside the school who can guide them in the right direction and can provide on-going support. It is a great program and invaluable for some of the students. Thank you."

**Ravinder, Head Teacher
Welfare, Liverpool Girls High
School NSW**

The role of case manager as advocate and ally is central to the relationship. For many young people, navigating the system is challenging, with a lack of knowledge and understanding about the options available to them. Sometimes referred to as case coordination, this ability to link services and make effective referrals is one aspect of case management which addresses a cluttered environment and avoids duplication. It also highlights the need for locally based agencies, with local connections, who know what services are available and how to access them.

The role of case manager as mentor and role model is that of a significant 'other adult', often otherwise lacking in the lives of this group of young people, providing a consistent and positive touch point to guide them through the challenges they face.

⁵ Dandolo Partners, Interim Evaluation of the National Partnership on Youth Connections Attainment & Transitions
http://www.deewr.gov.au/Youth/YouthAttainmentandTransitions/Documents/InterimEvaluationReport_Accessible.pdf

⁶ Youth Connections Subjective Wellbeing Report RMIT University Australia
<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Youth/YouthAttainmentandTransitions/Documents/YouthConnectionsReport.pdf>

⁷ Building Relationships for Better Outcomes – Peninsular Youth Connections Evaluation Stage 2 Report
<http://www.bsl.org.au/media/scripts/setup-analytics.aspx?did=10424>

2. Flexibility of the Program

The current Youth Connections Program allows for a range of individual and group activities, variety in the frequency of contacts and the ability to work according to the need and capacity of the young person. There is no limit on the length of time a worker can spend with a young person. This approach is highly suitable to working with young people who don't always respond well to a structured approach to service delivery. Young people who have significant barriers to engagement need time to build trust and rapport. It also allows for innovation and the ability to respond to the community and family as well as the individual. Although Youth Connections young people have not previously successfully engaged in a structured school system, experience shows the Youth Connections approach is flexible enough to be different to what they have previously experienced and failed at. It is therefore engaging for young people.

"It's important for young people to meet someone face to face to be able to have a connection. Being so remote with limited avenues of communication, it's important to have some contact with a youth worker which can continue to be supported by the community"
Burringurrah Community Aboriginal Corporation WA (remote)

The program is also adaptive to the location in which it is delivered, allowing for place based solutions that take into account other state based or community initiatives. This partnership approach builds collaboration at a local level and ensures that local communities are engaged in addressing the issues of young people. This is particularly necessary in regional and remote regions, where access to services may be limited. The flexibility of the Youth Connections program is considered one of the key strengths to its success.



Case management in a regional/remote setting - WA

3. Two Stage Outcomes Framework

Youth Connections has a two stage outcome framework which provides a wide range of options that are suited to the needs of high risk young people with complex barriers. It recognises progressive as well as final outcomes, ensuring what are called ‘soft’ results are taken into account as an important step towards longer term success.

"It's good to find people you can actually talk to, I would recommend it. Youth Connections definitely helped"
Jade 17 WA

The current framework therefore takes a holistic approach to goal setting and achievement. This two-step approach assists providers to work with the most disadvantaged young people. There is no incentive to create quick (and possibly short term) outcomes. It allows providers to build a model of delivery which works on the underlying issues first, ensuring more sustainability for final outcomes which come later. The outcomes framework is therefore an important part of the Youth Connections program and its success.

4. National Program

There are significant benefits to having a National Youth Transitions program which supports and complements state based initiatives. At an operational level; a national program ensures equitable access to support, particularly important for those young people who move from one jurisdiction to another. It provides a consistent approach and the possibility of more seamless links with national services such as *Centrelink* and *Job Services Australia*.

At a more strategic level, it allows for the national collation of information and understanding about young people’s issues. A national data set creates benchmarking across the country, which improves accountability, transparency and supports measurement of achievement. A national program also provides a vehicle for rolling out pilots or initiatives, and promotes the ability for service delivery agencies to network, innovate and share best practice across the country. The Youth Connections Program has a network structure which supports this process. National and state networks have proven their capacity to identify emerging themes and develop strategic partnerships to address such concerns.



Shine Program, Broome WA

5. Local Service Delivery in Local Communities

Whilst a national program, the current Youth Connections model contracts with local organisations that have local wisdom about the communities they work in. Current Youth Connections providers have a youth specialist approach, providing a continuum of services to young people and strong connections to the local community. This aspect of the program supports the inclusion of service delivery into its local setting, and is a powerful aspect of the current program. Providers are knowledgeable about state services, local education, welfare and employment systems, ensuring referral pathways are client centred, effectively identified and strengthened.

6. Youth Specific

The Youth Connections Program implicitly acknowledges that there is a difference in the delivery of youth services as compared with adult programs. Young people are the lowest skilled and the most vulnerable sector of the labour market. Young people respond cautiously to service providers. They look for advice from their peers, take risks and are often limited in their capacity to think about longer term consequences. These are normal aspects of growth and the development of a person from a child to an adult, however in an adult service they are not easily accommodated, with the consequences of non-compliance becoming an impediment to success.

“Students have developed a range of new strategies in order to be able to deal with anger management and social issues... there is less ‘angry’ and ‘aggressive’ behaviour and they do not react as quickly or with as much volatility”

Emma, Teacher Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School



Youth Connections Program - Challenges and Issues to Address

While the current Youth Connections program has been very successful, providers have identified the following four challenges and issues which should be considered in future policy decision making.

1. Limited Numbers

The current program is capped and most providers are at capacity. Whilst the program allows for additional rolling intake as young people achieve success and no longer require support, providers believe there is a large number of young people who are eligible for the program but who cannot access it due to limited capacity. The capture of unmet demand data is also problematic, with no consistent method across the country of measuring who is not being referred because it is known that the program is full. Some providers undertake an initial assessment with young people so that they are ready to participate in full service when a space becomes available, while others seek to keep young people connected through group and engagement activities until they can provide more support. Many providers also let it be known in the local community that numbers are full, preventing referrals in the first place. Ideally future services would have more capacity, ensuring all those in need can access the same support.

2. Alternative Education Programs and Availability

When an educational rather than an employment pathway is most appropriate for the young person, the option of returning to a mainstream school is often not suitable or accessible. This could be for a range of reasons, for example, previous behavioural issues with a perception of lack of safety for other members of the school community, or lost time making reengagement into mainstream education not possible. Youth Connections clients that completed the Shout Out survey noted relationships with their teachers as the greatest difficulty experienced in a traditional school setting. Many Youth Connections providers access alternative learning settings as they provide flexibility and practical learning in group settings. However, the alternative learning space is not well resourced or regulated, leading to a lack of consistency and availability. In areas where no alternative education options exist, especially in regional areas, additional funding needs to be provided to make this happen.



3. Further Strengthening of Links with Human Services

One of Youth Connections strengths is the capacity of providers to build relationships with other agencies and organisations to provide a 'wrap around' service to the young person. However, such relationship building is time intensive and relies on the cooperation of Federal services at the local level. Although successful relationships have been formed, there continues to be a piecemeal approach. Improved access to information and further systemic linkages would improve service delivery. Any future service should consider and address these issues as part of the program design, particularly considering the IT system and referral connections between Human Service programs.

4. Remote Service Delivery

Service delivery to support young people in remote parts of Australia is particularly challenging. Primary factors include the tyranny of distance, cost of transport, weather causing roads to become impassable and lack of trained /experienced staff living in the community. In addition to this, there is an imperative to respect cultural differences and obligations, which sometimes make regular attendance at learning and activities a compromise. A lack of employment and learning opportunities for young people who are in very remote areas, means that outcomes are not easy to achieve and career linkages are more difficult to make. YCNN commissioned research into what works to support young people in remote communities in 2012 "*Positive Pathways for Young People in Remote communities: What works?*" available on the DEEWR website <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Youth/YouthAttainmentandTransitions>.



The main conclusions of this research highlighted the need to spend time building relationships with young people (particularly important if you are only a visitor to a remote community), incorporate learning opportunities into social and community activities, work with families and not just young people, acknowledge existing strengths and interests in the community, find local mentors and role models and strengthen partnerships between agencies. The research also identified the need to address health and welfare needs first as a foundation for a positive pathway, and presents a series of touch points for guidance for those working remotely. Future services need to take into account the particular challenges for delivery in remote communities.

What Do Youth Connections Participants Think?

From July to October 2012, Shout Out Youth Summits were held in every State and the Northern Territory. Shout Outs were an opportunity for young people to meet with local decision makers who witnessed young people completing a survey which captured their thoughts and experiences with the program and education more generally. Shout Outs were well supported by Federal, State Members of Parliament and by Local Government.

Youth Connections clients that undertook the Shout Out Survey ranged from age 11 to 19+ with the majority of the participants aged 14-16 (60.5%). 497 Youth Connections clients (current and exited) took part in the survey.

Youth Connections clients responded overwhelmingly positively to the Youth Connections program. Eighty eight percent of respondents advised they would refer friends and other people they know to Youth Connections. Respondents noted their relationship with their Youth Worker/Case Worker, the activities undertaken and the ability to be assisted with a transition pathway were the primary reasons for continuing to engage with the program.

"...I'm more than willing to write a letter ...anything to keep this program in our school. The kids who attended Youth Shout Out had a great time and made some very positive and happy comments."

Principal, Eastside Lutheran College TAS

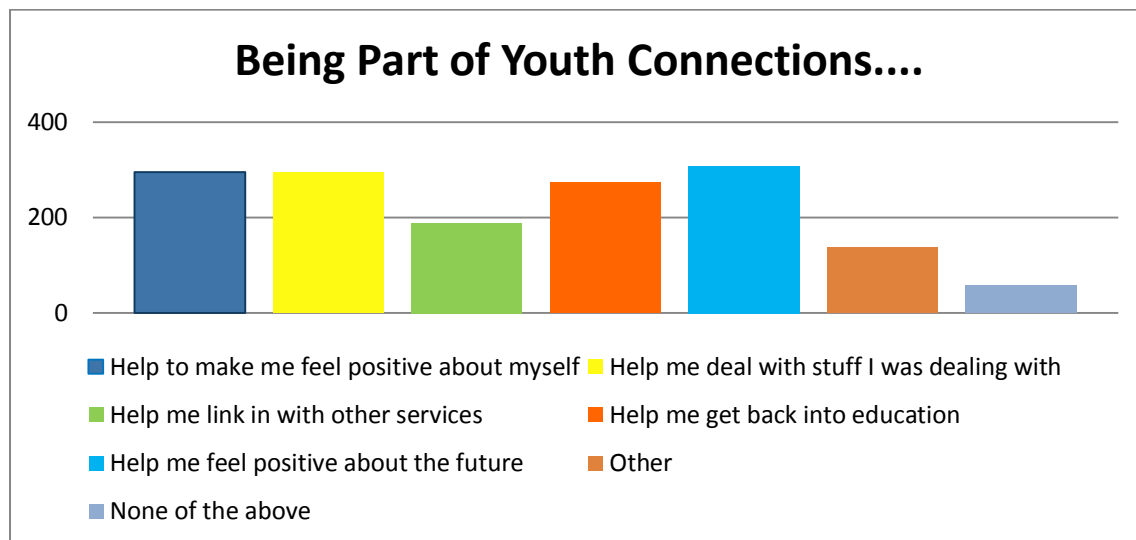
"I liked going to the SHOUT OUT! We had a good time and I got to let the lady know how much I like my worker"

Student 11 TAS

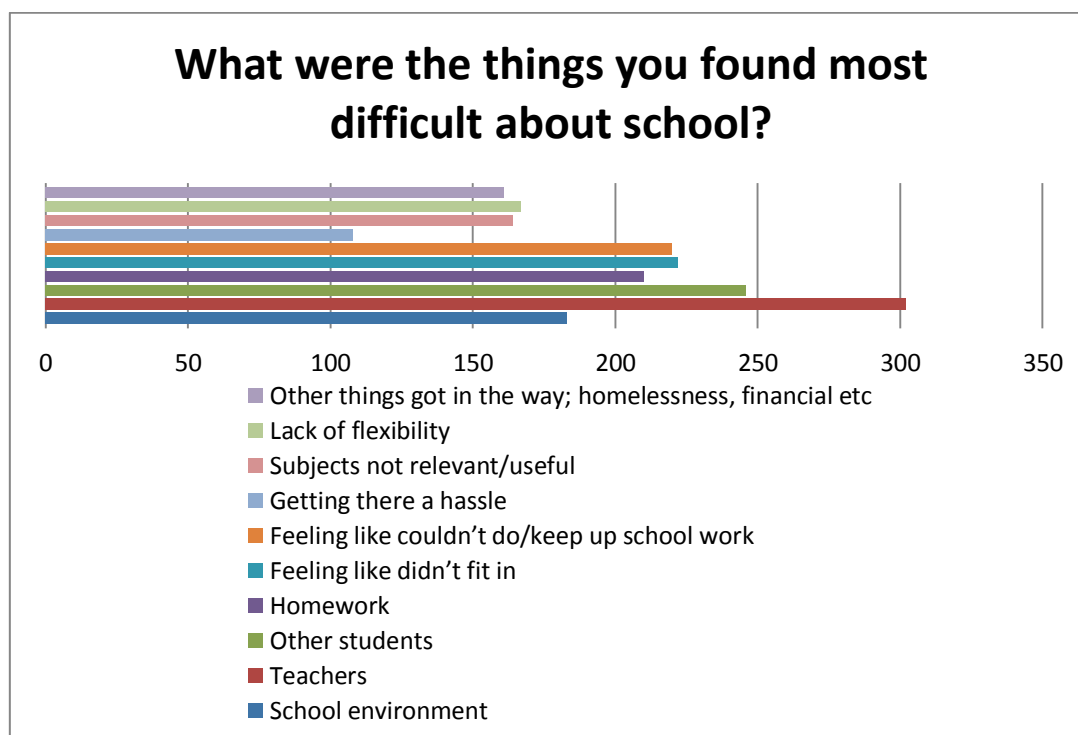


Shout Out Sydney NSW

The majority (69.5%) of Youth Connections survey respondents confirmed that the Youth Connections program was a significant factor in their decision to return to education. Respondents recognised that the Youth Connections program made them feel more positively about their future and themselves and helped them manage personal issues more effectively.



Irrespective of where the young people were situated throughout Australia, common themes emerged with respect to educational experiences. Connection with the Youth Connections program requires a young person to be disengaged or at risk of disengagement from education. It is therefore not surprising that many young people feel they had negative experiences in education including feeling like they didn't fit into school, difficulty in peer relationships and struggling to perform the schoolwork.



"I'm over the moon at the moment, I've finally got a job and I'm keeping out of trouble. My family look at me differently and I know they respect me now".

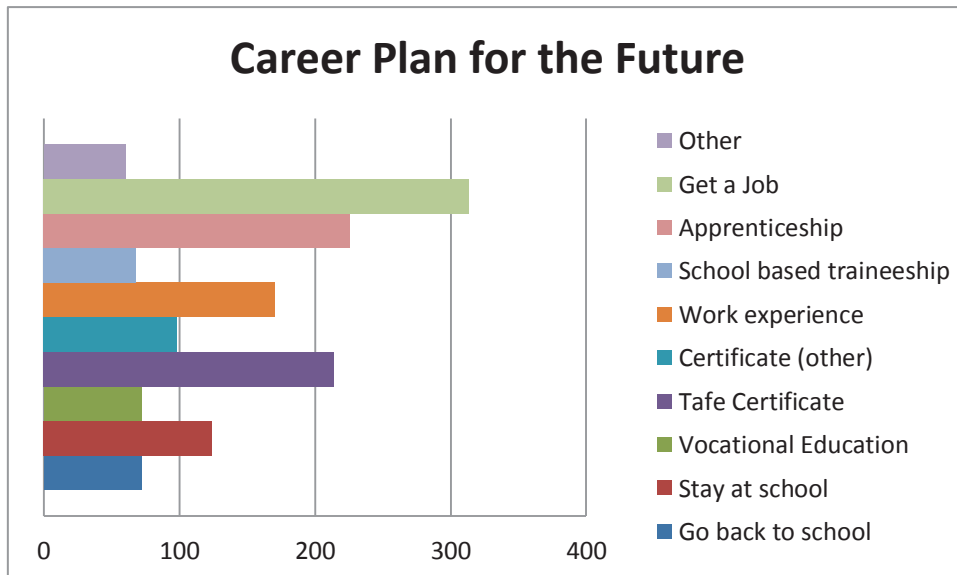
Hayze 16 QLD

Recognising the age that respondents started experiencing difficulties in their education was generally divided between ages 11-13 (37% respondents) and ages 14-16 (40%).

It is interesting to note that nearly 19% of respondents felt that they started having difficulties at school when in the lower and middle primary years (ages 5-10). Looking at this statistic from a state perspective, 29% of young people attending Shout Out in Adelaide noted that they started to experience difficulties in their education when aged 5-10 years whereas, only 15% of respondents at Sydney Shout

Out experienced difficulties at that age.

The majority of young people who completed the survey (66%) felt that the traditional school environment did not offer enough support to students struggling at school. This majority was reflected universally across Australia.



The ability of Youth Connections Providers to address barriers and successfully re-engage young people back into education or training was reflected in the desire of respondents to create employment or further education pathways.

In all, over 1,400 responses were received to this question which allowed respondents to pick as many options relevant to their future. The large number of responses indicates a sense of aspiration, recognising that a wide variety of options are available for consideration. This demonstrates that whilst the standard education setting was not working for them, they still had aspirations like all other young people to “get a good job”.

“The strength of the program is the ability of (the Youth Connections Provider) to cater for the individual needs of both the student and the school. strong collaboration with all members related to the individual to support their learning and social outcomes”

**Robert Patruno, Principal,
Verona School NSW**

Specific needs of Youth at Risk

The Space Between Education and Employment

From our specialised, extensive experience and understanding of young people, and considering the strengths of the current Youth Connections program outlined above, we believe future policy for youth at risk and future service delivery in a transition and engagement service needs to include the following:

- **Build Basic Skills.** Literacy and numeracy programs delivered in the community that are youth focused and built into practical activities, such as cooking and budgeting.
- **Build Aspirations.** Strong focus on career development, combining access to workplaces and work experience with high quality career advice that understands the local labour market and the likely chances of success for entry level workers.
- **Identify Pathways.** Clearly defined individual goals and outcomes mapped, building on identified strengths and breaking down goals into achievable steps. A case management approach should be used to build self-esteem and the confidence to achieve.
- **Address barriers.** Significant support to overcome issues that are preventing the success of the young person. High quality youth specialised support must be accessed for barriers including mental illness, homelessness and substance abuse.
- **Make Introductions.** Systems to support at risk young people to widen their networks and build skills to find and keep work will be required. Community based youth providers can create systems to achieve this.
- **Collaborative partnerships.** Communities need support to develop and sustain services and networks which are focused on achieving better outcomes for their young people. A future transitions program could be the catalyst for strong, ongoing partnerships which provide place based solutions for entrenched disadvantage.
- **Youth Specialist.** Young people respond best to a youth specific service which taps into peer networks, tailors assistance around the particular cognitive development needs of this cohort and engages in a range of ways including small group work, targeted but non-threatening outreach and social media. Effective youth specific program delivery employs a deep understanding of young people to connect, resource and develop sustainable, positive outcomes.

“a sincere thank-you for all your support with my daughter Jasmine and our family... you have been relentless in supporting and encouraging Jasmine. You never doubted Jasmine's abilities or gave up on trying to offer her every opportunity” **Mother of Jasmine, Youth Connections client QLD**

Conclusion and Key Recommendations

This paper identifies and addresses *the space in-between* for young people making the journey to adulthood. The space in-between a newly resourced education sector and the adult focused Job Services Australia. The space in-between child and adult; where young people with complex issues need to be supported to achieve their potential.

In preparing this paper, the key question has been to consider what can be done to ensure that Australia is equitable and prosperous for all young people. Our experiences support the research that indicates young people coming from difficult circumstances with complex issues often miss out on infrastructure and opportunities. The progression from school to work is not necessarily smooth.

Future policy for youth at risk needs to consider the current fiscal environment and changes in national policy direction, most notably, the planned implementation of recommendations from the Gonski Review.

YCINN recommends a two part strategy for the future:

Part A – A national specialist transition and engagement service

Young people at risk need a service that sits in between traditional schooling and employment assistance services. A service that builds aspirations and connects to employment; a stepping stone into adult services, adding value to both education and employment initiatives, filling the space in-between the two. This specialist service would demonstrate government understanding of the particular needs of young people and represents a commitment to investing in the future of all young Australians.

Part B – Support to reconnect to education

Youth Connections providers also believe there is a place for a Youth Connections style program, to complement and walk side by side the Gonski Review initiatives, providing community based, holistic support and case management for disengaged, disadvantaged young people with complex barriers who have rejected or been rejected by school. In the transition to the Gonski changes, the focus on assisting this cohort of young people should continue to be a nationally funded flexible approach, with capacity to meet demand, and to ensure that there are no gaps in services either during or after Gonski implementation. Such support should take a partnership approach, incorporating family, cultural networks and the broader community.



Appendix 1 - Case Studies

Disengaged from Mainstream Schooling - Regional Western Australia

Eddie (Year 10) was disengaged from mainstream schooling and referred to a behavioural centre. Eddie's barriers included drug /alcohol abuse, anger management and behavioural issues, an uncertain future with no clear pathway.

Eddie was referred to the Geraldton Regional Community Education Centre's Learning Engagement and Participation (LEAP) program, a safe centre of learning aimed at re-engaging young people and supporting them to transition into further education, training or employment. Individualised case management support is provided to LEAP participants through the Youth Connections program, ensuring participants receive holistic, wrap around services.



The story so far

Eddie successfully completed his Certificate I in Work Preparation and Certificate II in General Education for Adults. Eddie became a friendly face at LEAP welcoming new students and assisting staff. In 2012 Eddie enrolled at Durack Institute of Technology and secured a three year butcher apprenticeship.

What worked and why

With intensive one to one support from Youth Connections, Eddie was able to regain focus and build confidence and self-esteem. He was able to identify his goals and create a positive pathway to his future. Eddie was also able to identify and address his barriers. After transitioning from LEAP to Durack IT and into his apprenticeship, Youth Connections has continued to provide support when needed. Eddie is on his journey to a successful career and becoming a valued and valuable member of the Geraldton community.

Language Barriers – Metro New South Wales

John arrived in Australia 3 years ago and was referred to Youth Connections after he was bullied and physically assaulted by a group of students. He feared for his safety and did not want to return to school, concerned at the repercussions of reporting the incident to the Police.

The story so far

An assessment of John found that addressing his language barriers was of primary importance and he was enrolled in Cert 1 Language Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) UNLIMITED class.

What worked and why

During his time in the UNLIMITED class, John was praised for his attendance and mature attitude towards the work. He met with his Youth Connections worker to build literacy skills, social skills and set goals. John's goal is to become a Hairdresser and at the successful completion of the LLNP the Youth Consultant assisted him to enrol in Certificate II in Hairdressing with plans for an apprenticeship once completed. The Youth Connections worker was able to work with John to address his language barriers and help create and realise goals.

Complex Barriers - Metro Victoria

K is 14 (male) with a history of family breakdown, unstable living arrangements, anti-social behaviour, substance abuse, mental health and anger management issues. These barriers resulted in a very low academic level and poor school attendance. K was assessed as Year 7 education level.

K was accepted to the Youth Connections program with the aim of supporting K to re-engage into a simple form of educational engagement and to help minimise the barriers that prevented K from learning. K had discussed with his worker his goal of an apprenticeship.

The story so far

K began in the *Roll On* program which is an initiative for heavily disengaged young people to undertake a Certificate I in pre-vocational education, and combine it with a bicycle restoration workshop two days a week. K agreed to attend Oakwood Flexible Learning Network to assist him towards an apprenticeship. This flexible learning environment provides one to one teaching in a local community centre.

What worked and why

The worker spent several individual one on one engagement sessions with K taking him away from his housing situation and providing him with outdoor activities. The worker also developed strategies to assist with problems that may be occurring at home which were stopping K from attending further appointments or the Oakwood Flexible Learning Centre. As a result of individual and intensive support, K has significantly cut back on his anti-social behaviours and is now more willing to seek service support assistance from the worker and other organisations including Headspace. K has started to attend Oakwood Learning Centre with the goal of passing grade 10, and then starting a pre-apprenticeship in electrical engineering.

Mental Health Issues - Metro New South Wales

Youth Connections has been working with Louise since 2011. Louise had numerous barriers and issues; had been diagnosed with depression, bi-polar disorder, ADHD, delusional schizophrenia and psychosis, had been in and out of mental health units since being a toddler and was under a Juvenile Justice Order due to physical violence.

Louise had no family support, no financial income, drug and alcohol misuse, anger management issues and anxiety. With no routine in her life, she was time/date disorientated and would attend appointments hours late and at times under the influence of drugs/alcohol.

The story so far

To support Louise, the Youth Connections conducted 'soft entry' activities such as setting small projects to do at home and bring back to the case manager; developing posters, information flyers and worksheets around drug and alcohol, anger management and anxiety. This enabled Louise to get back into the routine of writing and thinking. The case manager also supported Louise to develop social skills by attending appointments and walking home so that she could reduce her anxiety with being in public places as well as increase her communication skills.

What worked and why

The case manager provided Louise with diaries, post-it notes and implemented other strategies in order to assist her to remember appointments and liaised closely with other services supporting the young person including counselling, mental health and a drug and alcohol service. This provided Louise with tools to exercise a degree of control over her situation and also created the ability to have small successes when appointments were kept and goals met.

Louise now attends on time, knows the day and time, can walk in public by herself without suffering anxiety or aggressive behaviour, and has completed and passed the literacy and numeracy test in order to commence further training.

CALD/Humanitarian Refugee young person – Western Sydney Region

Joe was born in Iran to Afghani parents and suffered great oppression and violence in Iran. Joe only had junior primary level education and began working at the age of 10 to help support the family after the death of his father. Joe was tortured by his employer including being whipped by steel cables.

Joe arrived in Australia in 2009 as a humanitarian refugee and attended an Intensive English Centre for 1 year where he was bullied by other students. Joe now lives in a house in very poor condition and struggles to maintain the home and supplement the income for his mother, and three younger siblings.

The story so far

Joe was referred to Youth Connections and has now developed strong friendships with a group of students that he met through a series of workshops run by Youth Connections. Joe engaged well with fellow students and increased his literacy, and budgeting skills. Joe has also learnt strategies to cope with bullying and build resilience, self-confidence and his social skills.

What worked and why

Joe has shone in the group and shared amazing positivity and personal ambition. Joe is studying hard, gaining good marks at school and hopes to go to university after year 12. Joe has also gained recognition from school staff for his strong engagement in the Youth Connections program and for encouraging his friends.

Aboriginal young person, disengaged & teen pregnancy – Central Australia

Joanne (aged 16) was referred to Youth Connections by her school counsellor. Joanne was disengaged from school and suffering depressive symptoms. Joanne had withdrawn from family, school, and friends. Joanne had very little contact with her mother, unstable living conditions and virtually no financial support.

The story so far

Youth Connections worked with Joanne to re-establish her relationship with her mother, her school, and connect Joanne with mental health counselling. Joanne was able to take small steps forward and achieved positive results. It wasn't an easy journey, at times the road was both up and down. While on the program, Joanne found out that she was pregnant. Youth Connections were able to offer advice on options available to Joanne.

Once Joanne decided the best path forward, Youth Connections were able to assist Joanne to connect with the local pregnancy support program. Joanne, now has a strong relationship with her mother, feels more empowered and is planning to continue her study after the birth of her child. Joanne's goal is to become an Aboriginal health worker.

What worked and why

Joanne has been able to achieve positive outcomes due to her own resilience coupled with strong and positive support from Youth Connections. Youth Connections provided individual support as well as connected Joanne with other specialist agencies to provide support.

The Youth Connections National Network thanks Youth Connections Providers nationwide who have contributed to this paper and Youth Connections young people who have warmly shared their stories and journey with the program.

