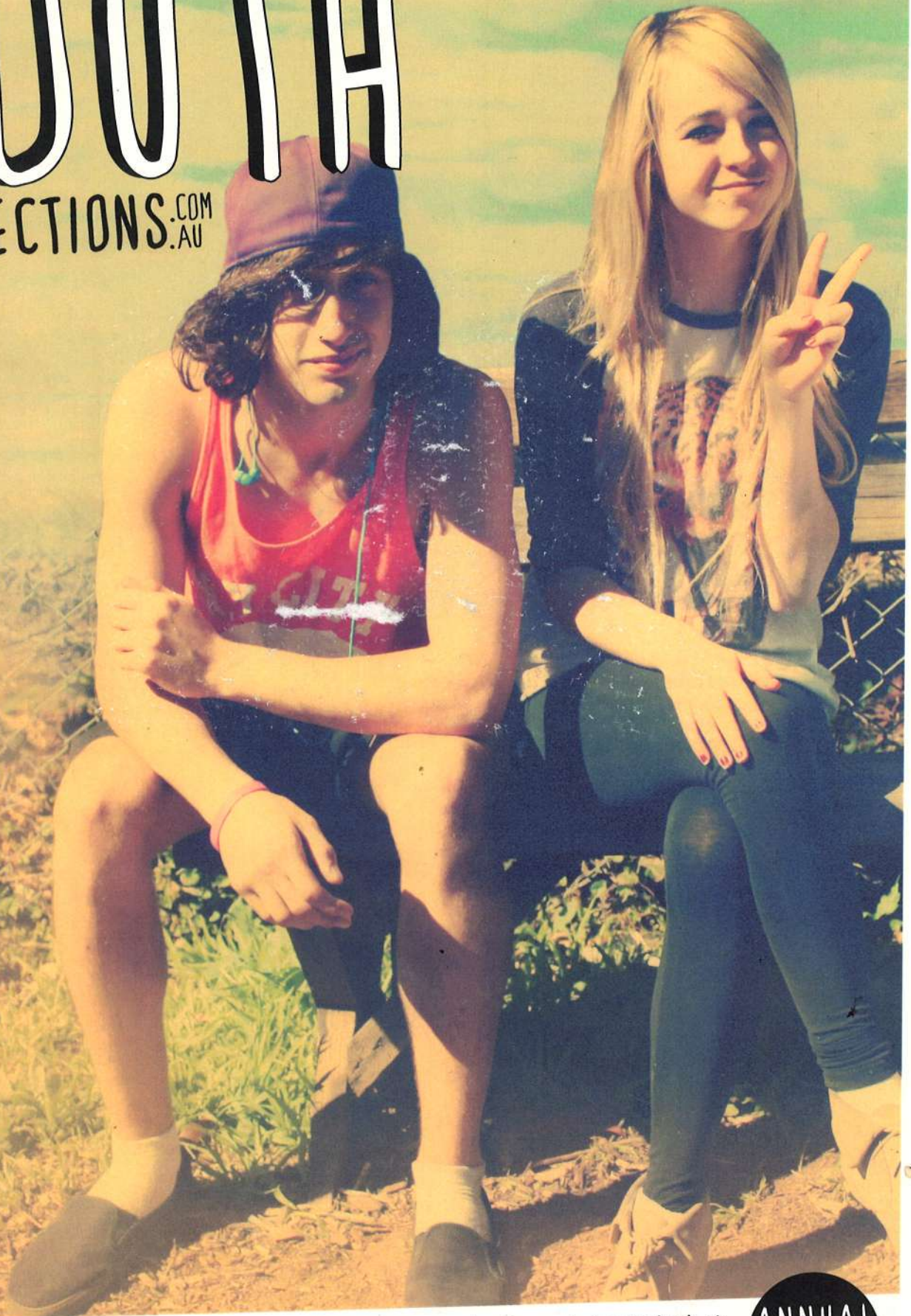


YOUTH

CONNECTIONS.COM
AU



"Our country's greatest resource is our young people. One only has to look at the engagement and involvement of young people in all aspects of our society to know that the future of our country is in very good hands." – Pat Lewis, Chair

ANNUAL
REPORT

2011-2012



GREEN CENTRAL



Green Central is the home of youthconnections.com.au, Koori Connect, YC Industry Link Pty Ltd, yG enterprise Pty Ltd and BISEE Pty Ltd.



The Green Central site was funded under the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Jobs Fund to create employment opportunities for young people on the Central Coast during the global financial crisis in 2009/2010.



The site buildings were retrofitted and refurbished, organic gardens planted, the natural landscape restored using apprentices and trainees under mentorship from skilled tradesmen.



Today it is a space for social enterprises, a sustainable house, Indigenous Skills Centre, Media Centre, horticulture facility and alternate learning.



GO DIGITAL



1. Grab your iPhone, iPad or Android phone
2. Download the free QR code app from the App Store or Google Play
3. Open the app and hold your camera over the QR code
4. A digital copy will load to read, share or download (Open in your web browser to allow greater zoom)

MISSION

Turning education into jobs!

VISION

youthconnections.com.au helps young people aged 11-19 on the Central Coast access employment, education, training and recreational opportunities so they can reach their full potential.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Yamma Yamma. We respect and acknowledge the Darkinjung people past and present on whose land we live and enjoy today. We cherish and nurture our youth offering knowledge and wisdom through their life's pathways.

Words: Charlotte Dickie

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**YOUTH
CONNECTIONS**
COM.AU

TURNING
EDUCATION INTO JOBS!

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ORG CHART

BOARD 2011-12



Chair & Treasurer
Patrick Lewis



Deputy Chair
David Ella



Director & Past Chair
Niels Jacobsen



Director
Sharryn Brownlee



Director
David Hope



**Past Director
Past Treasurer**
Richard Cooke

Past Director
Anna Ainsworth



ADVISORY COMMITTEES

**Transitions
Advisory
Committee**

**Industry
Advisory
Committee**

**Partnerships
Advisory
Committee**

**Youth
Reference
Group**

**Aboriginal
Advisory
Committee**



CEO



Maggie MacFie



**Youthconnections.
com.au**

Disability Services
Partnership Brokers
+ School
+ Business
+ Community
Youth Connections
Program



**YC Industry Link
Pty Ltd**

GTO
Independent
Employment Adviser
Structured Workplace
Learning
YC Media



**yG enterprise
Pty Ltd**

Car Cleaning
Construction
Events/PR
Graphic Design
Horticulture
Mechanical
Sustainability



BISEE Pty Ltd

Finance
HR
Payroll



Koori Connect

Freedom Ride 2011
Guriwu Project
Indigenous Skills
Centre
Koori Connect
Nyanga Walang
PaCE
The Coolamon on
Green Central

CEO REPORT

MAGGIE MACFIE



Each year while compiling our Annual Report we ask ourselves the following questions: how can we measure and represent the health of the organisation to the community we serve? How can we make the voice of our young people heard as a dynamic and influential force? And how can we improve on the genius of the previous year and remain at the “cutting edge” of annual report presentation? One thing that’s certain is that our Annual Report must set us apart from all other organisations because we have created a unique and inclusive niche within the youth and transition space and should be represented as such.

This year our Annual Report reflects styles of social media—Twitter and Instagram. These two styles blend and merge seamlessly to tell our stories visually and with powerful quotes from our staff and young people. Our stories and the stories of our young people are told in bite size tweets—each to be read independently or as a whole. This is a bit like how we work with our young people, sometimes on a one to one basis, sometimes in teams, often exposing them to a range of educational styles which merge to make a whole, and always cognitive of what works best for each individual: bite size or big chunks of learning.

2011/2012 has seen an unexpected yet exciting growth in our enterprises, with our apprentices and Structured Workplace Learning students working across a range of business and community projects and proving to all that the social enterprise model can and is working here on the Central Coast, creating employment opportunities and giving those most marginalised in the labour market the opportunity to develop their work readiness in a supported environment. The home to all of our enterprises is Green Central.

New to the suite of youthconnections.com.au programs in 2012 is Connectors. This year we received Board of Studies endorsement to run an alternative year 10 and this is what Connectors has become – the best chance 15 disengaged young people from across the Central Coast have of fulfilling their attainment and employment goals.

This year our sense and appreciation of the space and the work we do with young people has shifted. We continue to pursue the noble goal of ensuring every young person leaves school with an education, employment or training opportunity. Now we also assume that all of our young people have a great deal to offer in terms of strengths and capacities but some do not have access to the economic and

social resources that can maximise their potential. Through the work of our gifted youth workers and tradies we now understand that it isn’t just about work and learning for our young people. There are other equally important areas of their lives such as personal, interpersonal and cultural wellbeing. This year I feel confident we’ve understood the need to support flexible and non-linear transitions that will reflect the young individual’s diverse and dynamic reality. This understanding has challenged us to develop an education model that offers multiple integrated learning opportunities, listens and responds to the educational and social challenges faced by our students, and builds collaboration among individuals and service providers to ensure successful transitions. This understanding is why the Green Central and yG enterprise model works!

There are many people in and outside of the organisation who have influenced each stage of its development. I would like to thank the Board members who have retired from the Board in the past 12 months but who have left a remarkable legacy. They include our long serving Chair, David Abrahams; long serving Treasurer, Richard Cooke; long serving Director and former Chair, Niels Jacobsen; former Chair, Sharryn Brownlee; and Anna Ainsworth. There are two long serving and now retired staff members, Claudia Davies and Maria Kelly, who should also be thanked for their valuable contribution to the organisation when it was removing the “training wheels” and taking those first steps towards sustainability or as General Manager Marcus Watson would say, “responsibility”.

To the current Board and staff of youthconnections.com.au, to our Advisory Committee members and all our stakeholders in education, industry and community, the content of this Annual Report belongs to you. You all greatly contribute to the economic and social wellbeing and aspirations of our youth so we can all share inclusively in the benefits of our community and our nation. Thank you.



BOARD REPORT



≡≡≡ PAT LEWIS
DIRECTOR + CHAIR
YOUTHCONNECTIONS.COM.AU

Our country's greatest resource is our young people. One only has to look at the engagement and involvement of young people in all aspects of our society to know that the future of our country is in very good hands.

Many of our young people develop a positive sense of self and direction in life through their schooling, sports, community groups and family. However, others do not find this so easy, and if not supported and mentored, their potential will be wasted.

The mission of youthconnections.com.au is to provide support and mentoring to our young people and this is why I have been proud of this organisation for so long. I have seen many examples of young people who were uncertain as to their future career paths. After spending time with us, they leave with many new skills, greatly increased confidence and a clear direction of where they see themselves in the future. It's not unusual to have young people return to visit and proudly relate their successes to us!

The challenge for our organisation is to provide a caring and empathetic environment for young people in need of support. This encourages them to engage with us and allows us to assist them toward a more positive future.

The success of this engagement depends on our staff and the strength of our programs. Both have been developed over many years by our absolutely dynamic CEO Maggie MacFie, the most imaginative and lateral thinking leader of social change I have ever worked with. Through Maggie, our organisation is always several years ahead of everyone else in innovative and effective programs to re-engage young people with learning.

Maggie has drawn together and nurtured an outstanding work team, many of them young people, including some who have graduated from our programs. All are to be commended for the relationships they've developed onsite, in the schools, in the workplace and within the community. Congratulations to you all and many thanks for your dedication.

We also have a strong Board that oversees the operations of youthconnections.com.au and continually encourages our staff and clients. Many thanks and congratulations to you too for your commitment. Sadly, we have had to say goodbye to one of our most loyal and long-standing Board members, Richard Cooke, who has had to stand down due to health issues. Richard has an encyclopaedic knowledge of all areas of vocational education and training and has been an enormous asset to the Board. We wish Richard well in his retirement.

With the interests of young people so varied, it is difficult to present a suite of programs with sufficient diversity to be able to appeal to each and every one of them. However, at youthconnections.com.au we have been able to do just that. The pages of this Annual Report are filled with the most amazing stories about our many programs and the young people who are working and learning in them. They range from programs for disengaged youth right through to enterprises for young people working professionally. I do hope that you enjoy reading these wonderful stories.



YOUTH CONNECTIONS PROGRAM

360 PARTICIPANTS

PARTNERS

- > Headspace
- > Centrelink
- > Central Coast high schools

FUNDING

- > Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations



The Youth Connections Program (YC Program) offers case management in schools and in the community for young people thinking about leaving school early. We help these young people to re-think this decision, or to look at other options to further their education. Basically, case management and referrals and a lot of heart. That's the YC Program. Read on!



At the start of the year we extended a hand to the newly established Young Parents Program Wyong, by offering ongoing financial support to St Phillip's Christian College and case management to its participants. This program supports school aged young people who have or are expecting a child.



We refer young people into our own contemporary and flexible programs, Connectors and Transitions, where they receive ongoing case management, learn to follow instructions, manage their time, use public transport and maintain their engagement in learning.



In addition to these programs, YC caseworkers facilitated Shine Girls, a personal development program for young women aimed at increasing their self-esteem and resilience and supporting them to understand their own personal worth, strength and purpose.



BWSC Umina allowed us to facilitate an in-school suspension program. We were able to offer help with homework, case management and facilitated group activities.



We're already scheming for the year ahead; we recently met with Lifecare to discuss running anger awareness workshops for young people participating in our TradeStart and Connectors programs.



LINDA
TEAM LEADER

> A lot of the kids we work with are not up to education. Some are homeless, some are couch surfing and some are in refuges. Some have dealings with the police and have never been in programs before. With these young people we go back to the basics. We listen to what they want. We begin where they are up to. And if we don't have a program that suits their needs, we refer them to places that do.

> YC caseworkers Julie and Bec do a mammoth job out in the community with the referrals from schools, agencies, families and Centrelink. Their contribution is invaluable.



JULIE
CASE WORKER

> Without the YC Program young people would miss out on an intensive, individualised pathway of support.



TRADESTART



90 STUDENTS
PARTNERS

- > Erina High School
- > NSW Department of Education and Communities



TradeStart is for early school leavers interested in a trade. It has a cool learning environment—teachers act as facilitators, caseworkers and tradies support and mentor students.



It was first launched as a pilot program in 2011, with 45 students signing up. Over half of these students had acquired jobs by the end!



In 2012, we also had 45 students. They rotated between different trades onsite and completed work experience with employers outside youthconnections.com.au.



We had one student this year who wasn't that keen on any of the trades. Then she got up to the ladies design and communications office and found her groove, typing up interviews and answering the work phone. She's gone on to do a Certificate III in Business Services.



In fact, four students from the 2012 group have been accepted into TAFE, in Business Services and Metal Fabrication and Welding.



One student snagged work experience at Taronga Zoo, others got part-time work, one picked up an apprenticeship.



If you ever need to find one of the TradeStart students on their lunch break, they'll be under the tree hanging out with Mitch and Mark our youth workers.



Bonnie reckons the environment is conducive to work. "It's a lot more laidback than school and I find it a lot easier. We get the work done, but in our own time, without being forced. It's been a good experience so far."



>>>>
MITCH
CASE WORKER

> I started with TradeStart in 2011, my role being to case manage the students and prepare them for employment. There's been so many success stories for TradeStart students and I am proud to have contributed to this.

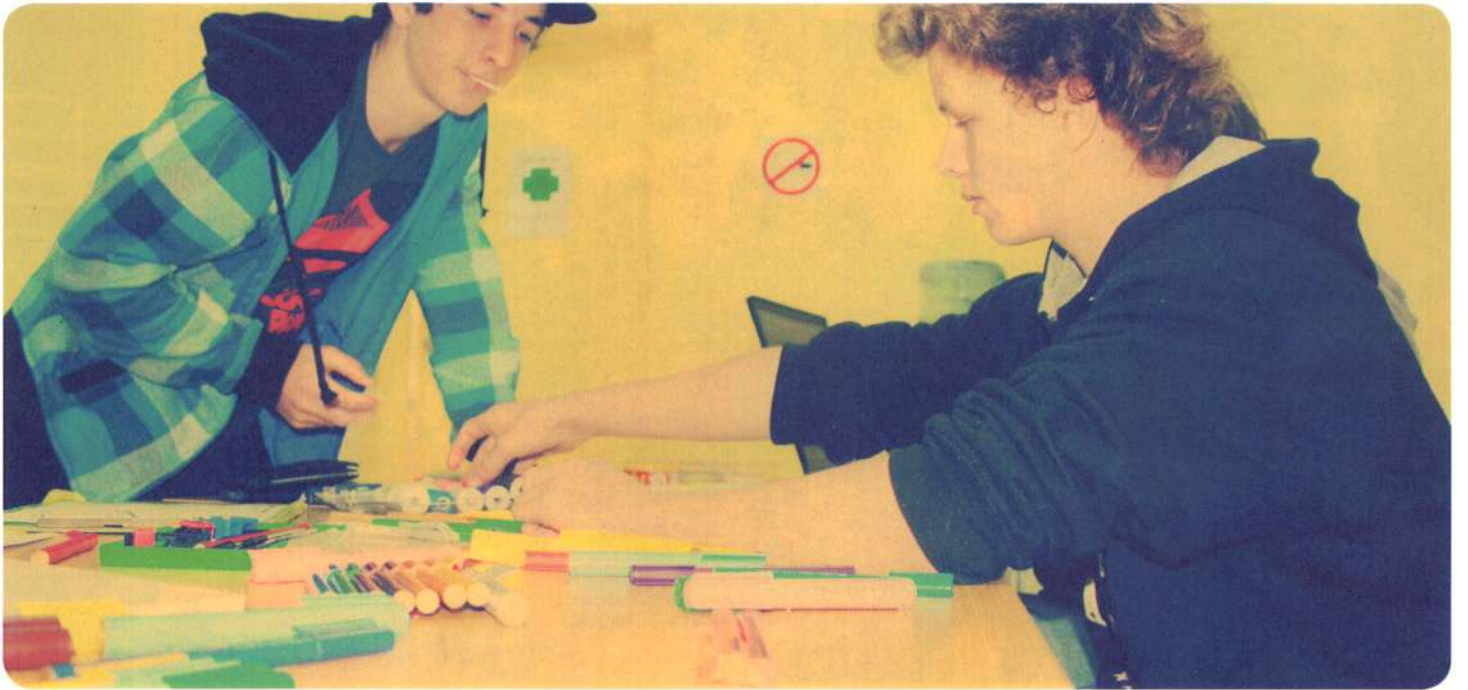


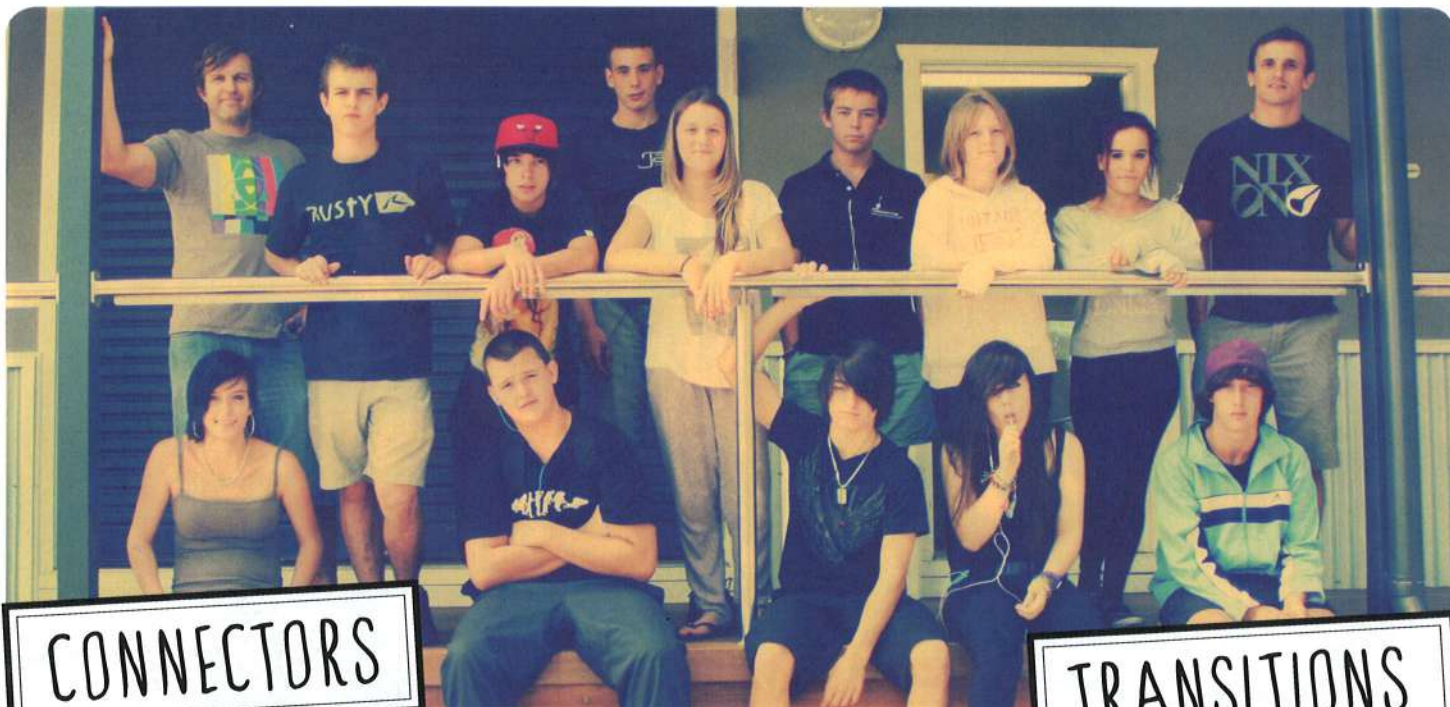
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BONNIE
STUDENT

> At the end of year 10, the deputy principal of Henry Kendall High suggested TradeStart as an option for me. I wasn't sure what to expect when I enrolled at the beginning of the year. So far I've been involved in trades onsite including IT, mechanics, media and hospitality. Hospitality is my favourite. The Coolamon is a relaxed and friendly environment and I enjoy cooking and serving customers.









CONNECTORS

35 STUDENTS
FUNDING
 > Not Funded



Let's talk about Connectors — an endorsed Board of Studies program delivered by youthconnections.com.au offering an alternate year 10 for young people who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging from education.



Connectors crew don't plug away at a desk from 9-3 to meet educational outcomes. Instead, they get outdoors and mix up school with sport.



Connectors kids have participated in a Cops VS Kids footy day at Bateau Bay, completed fitness training with NSW Sport and Rec and have headed to Somersby Falls and Soldiers Beach for some outdoor fun.



There's also a strong focus on work experience. We've had young people working with employers such as yG Automotive, Aztec Beauty and Day Spa, Static Hair and Beauty and YC Media.



Students loved volunteering at Beyond Blue and the NAISDA dance festival during the year.



We interviewed a bunch of the Connectors cohort and asked what they thought of the program . . .



Tom, said "I completed my work experience with yG Automotive. I enjoyed fixing, servicing and repairing cars. The apprentice and I replaced the shocks and springs in a Land Cruiser. I really enjoyed working with yG enterprise because it was a fun, safe and good work environment."



ALLY STUDENT

> My first day was scary. I didn't really talk to anyone. I'm not usually very social but it's been easier for me at Connectors. I would rather be at Connectors than at school. I love the excursions we have been on. Somersby Falls was the best. I love sport, which we have done a lot of, and I'm interested in becoming a beautician.

TRANSITIONS

65 STUDENTS
FUNDING
 > Not Funded



Transitions differs in that the young people it accepts struggle to meet the standards of behaviour and engagement expected of them at school. They're from years 8-10 and are also often disengaged from their families.



Mornings start with a yarning circle where young people share their general thoughts and personal experiences.



From here, the young people move into different activities: cooking, carpentry, shopping. These activities help them to develop their listening skills, work effectively as a team and be thoughtful toward fellow students and teachers.

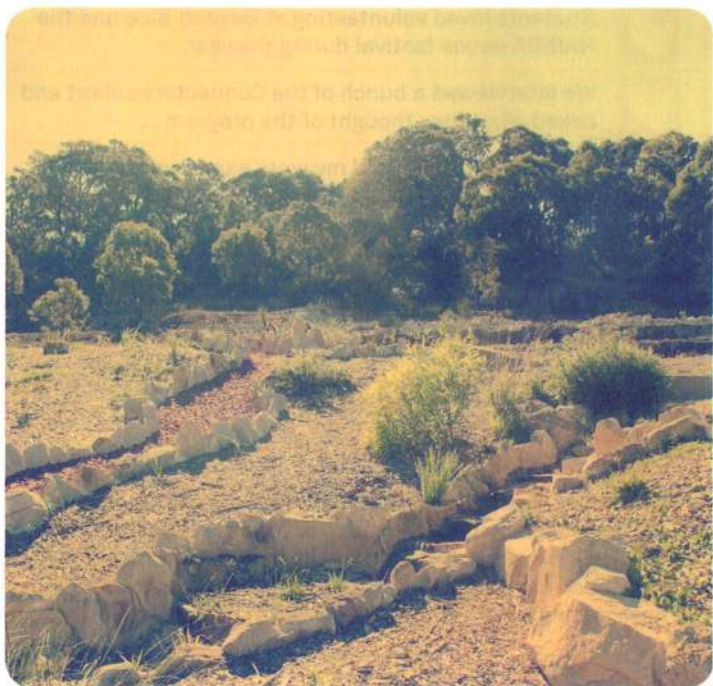


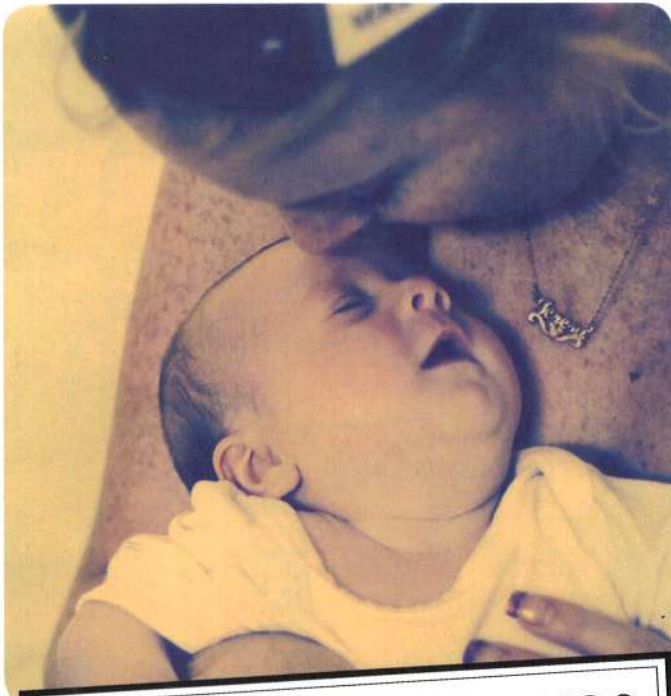
Although most of the students attending Transitions in 2011 were severely disengaged and not regularly attending school, they did turn up to the Transitions program more than 80% of the time. Something is definitely working!



LINDA TEAM LEADER

> It was wonderful to monitor these young people who, when referred to the program, were severely disengaged from education and in most cases their families. By supporting these young people and case managing them we managed to reconnect many of them with their families and educational pathways.





PARTNERSHIP BROKERS

SCHOOL + BUSINESS + COMMUNITY



19 PROJECTS

FUNDING

> Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations



LYN PARTNERSHIP BROKER

> I'm blown away by the willingness of people to partner and support young people, keeping them engaged in school and helping them to continue with education. There are lots of groups willing to work together to get good outcomes and I'm really impressed by that.



Our Partnership Brokers fuse the services of two or more organisations to create new projects that help young people attain their year 12 or equivalent.



The long awaited aerospace project has taken off! Dubbed 'VH-UC1' and launched in the beginning of 2012, a group of year 11/12 students are working towards a Certificate II in Aeroskills at Warnervale Airport. The project is the brainchild of aeronautical engineer and pilot Stan Webber. We've got 12 students enrolled and one has been placed in an aeroskills apprenticeship.



VH-UC1 is a partnership between youthconnections.com.au, Hunter Valley Vintage Aircraft Maintenance, Central Coast Aero Club, Hunter Institute of TAFE, and Wyong Shire Council.



Our Partnership Brokers pulled together the Killarney Vale, Bateau Bay and Tumbi Umbi Garden Project (KBT). The garden was created on top of a decimated wasteland in the centre of a housing commission area. The site was designed to conserve water via a self-irrigating underground system that disperses rainwater and no fertilisers or chemicals are used on the plants. 44 long-term unemployed people had the opportunity to undertake accredited training in Conservation and Land Management while gaining additional skills in traditional Aboriginal land management and plant identification. It's an ongoing and self-sustaining community partnership.



The KBT Garden is the product of a successful partnership between Equilibrium, Break Thru People Solutions, Jobfind Centre, Housing NSW, The Salvation Army Employment Plus, Samaritans, The Entrance Lions Club, Tuggerah Lakes Community College, Tuggerah Lakes Secondary College, KBT Community Nursery and youthconnections.com.au. It was also supported through the generosity of many local businesses, which provided equipment and building supplies for the project.



Babes with Babes is a flexible alternative education program hosted at Narara Valley High School for young people in year 10, 11 or 12. There's a range of courses available and all encourage participants to study at their own pace. This one's a partnership between youthconnections.com.au, Central Coast Family Support Services, Burnside, Child and Family Health – NSCCAHS, the Benevolent Society and Narara Valley High.



The Young Parents Program Wyong is an alternative education program offering courses for year 9 to 12 students that count toward their HSC. It's also supplemented with workshops on parenting, lifestyle skills and nutritional cooking. Wadalba Community School, St Phillip's Christian College, and the DALE Young Mums Program, were brought together to run this program.



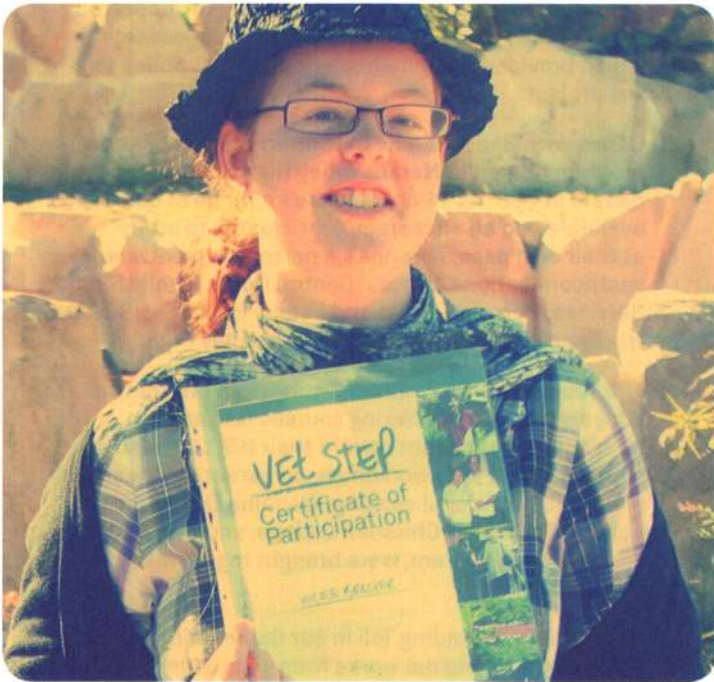
PhotoVoice – Standing Tall in our Community showcased 60 original works from 15 students disengaged from education. Through a series of photographs, students revealed aspects of the community they were proud of, aspects that defined their place in the community. This project culminated in an exhibition.



PhotoVoice was an opportunity for students who were at risk of leaving school to be taught basic photography skills and be provided with a camera. The project was undertaken by Tuggerah Lakes Secondary College in partnership with Wyong Shire Council, youthconnections.com.au and local John Ralph's Camera House.



For students on the Peninsula, who had just been suspended, and were stoked at the prospect of a week at the beach or the skate park, you'll have to think again. The Peninsula Suspension Support Team program targeted students in years 7-9 who had been suspended from school. The program was a partnership between Evolution Youth Service, PCYC Umina, Getting It Together Scheme, Wesley Mission and youthconnections.com.au.





VET STEP



The VET STEP program is designed for early school leavers aged 15-21 years of age, jobseekers and students who are at risk of disengaging from school. It aims to build employability and vocational skills through assessment, practical learning, work experience, accredited training and workplace mentoring.



The VET STEP model was discussed extensively with varying partner organisations, stakeholders, JSAs, and employers, until finally a project was decided upon . . .



The project involved the refurbishment of a toilet block at the Newcastle Showgrounds. Participants spent five weeks on the job under the supervision of a qualified trainer.



11 young people successfully completed a Certificate of Attainment in Construction for participating in the project!



In May 2012, we piloted another project tailored to the needs of employers in the Home and Community Care industry. Candidates undertook a full-time eight-week program comprising of a practical community project, vocational training and work experience with partnering employers to gain a Certificate II in Community Services.



13 young people successfully completed VET STEP, two of those being Michael and Nicole from the Transition to Work program.



ANDREA
CO-ORDINATOR

> The HACC Central Coast Pilot aimed to attract young people into community services, a growing industry most wouldn't consider. The pathways are varied and range from general home maintenance and domestic assistance, to business administration and IT, to nursing, case management and health.

26 PARTICIPANTS
2 COURSES
PARTNERS

- > HACC Training Project
- > Home Care Services
- > Central Coast Meals on Wheels
- > Community Care Services
- > Break Thru People Solutions
- > NSW State Training Services
- > Marist Youth Care
- > Castle Personnel
- > NTS
- > Newcastle Showground



MICHAEL
TTW PARTICIPANT

> I enjoyed the VET STEP program, particularly interacting with the elderly and I am also very interested in gardening. The program encouraged me to pursue further training and I am currently considering a traineeship in horticulture. I hadn't considered this before.



NICOLE
TTW PARTICIPANT

> Before the VET STEP program I was unsure what I wanted to do. Having completed the program I realised that I love working in home and community care and I am now going to complete a Certificate III in Aged Care. The program really helped me to move in the right direction.



SKOOL'S OUT

T-TEAM

30 CLIENTS PER WEEK

26 PARTICIPANTS PER TERM

FUNDING

> NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care

FUNDING

> NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care



Skool's Out and T-Team are two of our most dynamic programs. Geared toward young people with a disability, Skool's Out is for social networking and peer support and T-Team is for after school and school holidays. There's overlap. They're interchangeable. They're fun. And they're split between Green Central and Tuggerah.



In 2012, the disability programs relocated to Green Central. Rono is stoked. Participants now get to hang out with passing pollies, students from the other programs and staff—but it also means Rono can now hit up The Coolamon for afternoon coffees.



Participants have the option just to chill out or to engage with the activities. Many of the activities aim to foster within the young people a sense of being respected, included and valued. They also aim to build confidence, so there's plenty of drama, plenty of art.



"I love the cooking, cleaning and gardening," says Chelsea, a 15-year-old participant in T-Team. "Oh, and playing UNO. I'm an UNO freak!"



"At T-Team we learn to respect and get along with each other. I enjoy interacting with kids from other schools," says Kosta, also 15 and in T-Team.



Rono reckons Kosta is an amazing artist. Painting is his favourite activity and he's recently been involved in a graffiti art project at RYSS. "We would love to have Kosta paint a mural up here at Green Central," says Rono. Watch this space.



If you're at Green Central toward the end of a school term make sure you pop your head in, these guys definitely know how to throw a party!



CHelsea
T-TEAM PARTICIPANT

> I love it when everyone is having fun and being really hypo. It makes me laugh. And squeal!



CLAIRE
SUPPORT WORKER

> We are not just a stock standard after school program, we really aim to stand out with our service and the facilities we've got.



RONO
CO-ORDINATOR

> Green Central is an inclusive environment and ideal for the disability programs. Everyone at Green Central pulls together to provide a space where our young people feel part of a whole.



TRANSITION TO WORK



Transition to Work (TTW) is for young people with a disability who have completed year 12 and are on the look out for work. We provide individual and group activities to assist them to become work ready and get a job!



As TTW is located up at Green Central the young people have jumped on board with the tradies to learn new skills. They've been working in the café, on cars in the automotive shed and in the garden with our horticulture specialist.



They've also been assisting ex-TTW participant Mark with the yG enterprise Car Cleaning services.



Supplementing hands-on experience, TTW participants also learn how to write resumes, cover letters and look for work.



We had some unreal outcomes in 2011! One TTW client completed a Certificate II in Conservation and Land Management; another got a job at an Aboriginal aged care home working in horticulture; a third attained his RSA and RCG.



In 2012, two TTW clients participated in the VET STEP program gaining a Certificate II in Community Services; another student graduated from the Conservation and Land Management (CALM) course with a Certificate II; and a third student completed his barista training.



"All of our kids have been engaged in different work experiences and TAFE courses this year. Everyone is focused on the industry they want to end up in and they are all really motivated!" says TTW Co-ordinator Catherine.



In addition to job hunting, participants also engage with other activities—especially art. TTW's artwork is currently on display in the Education Centre at Green Central. According to TTW Co-ordinator Ulrike, art is very important in the development of a young person, "A person is not a whole person unless there is lots of art," she says. "Art enhances natural thinking and helps participants to focus."

15 PARTICIPANTS
FUNDING
NSW Department of Ageing,
Disability and Home Care



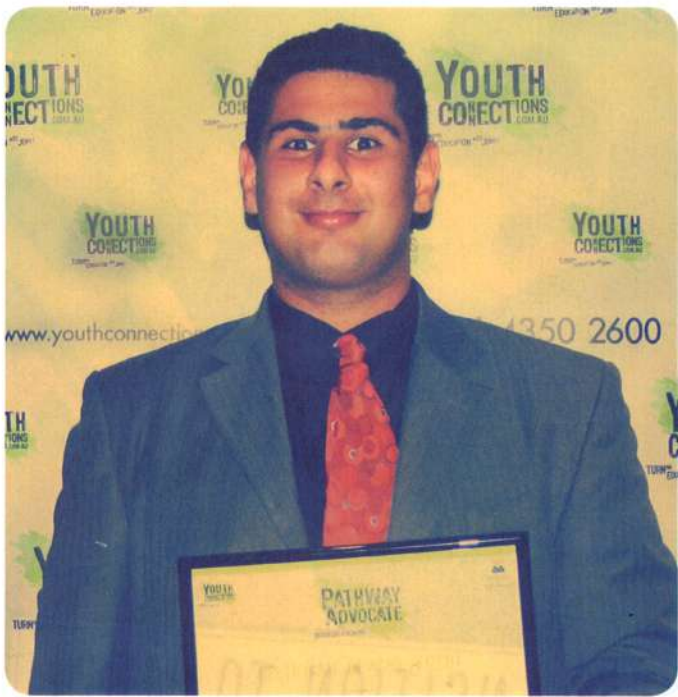
RENAE
TTW PARTICIPANT

> I like it at Green Central. I like the classrooms and all the different trades. I enjoy cooking, going to the gym and the excursions we go on. I loved it when we went on a boat around Woy Woy and visited the art gallery at East Gosford. After TTW I would like to be in childcare, I love working with children. Every Wednesday I volunteer at the Kindy Patch helping to prepare meals and play with the children. I also did work experience in the Coolamon on Green Central, which I really loved. Everyone in the café helped me out, especially Robert (TTW participant). I've also made a lot of really good friends at TTW.

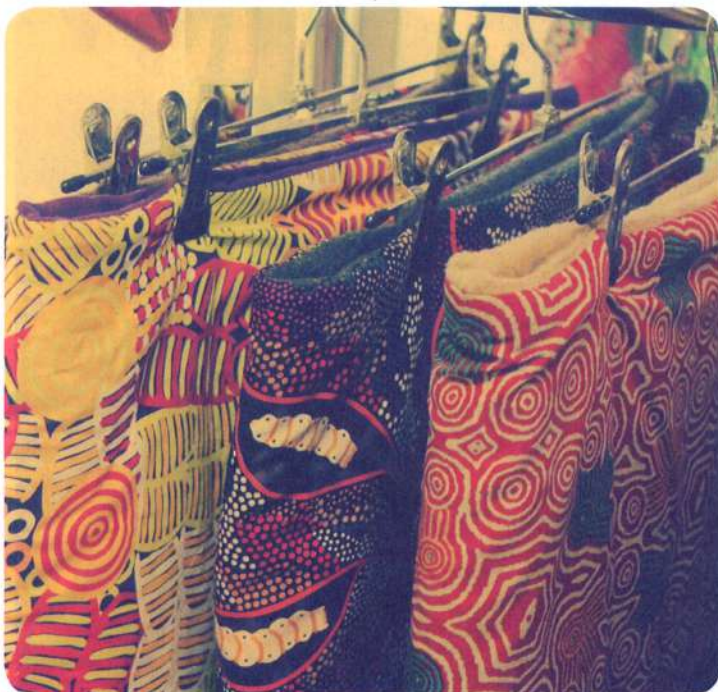


ASHLEY
DISABILITY PROGRAMS TEAM LEADER

> Nicole (TTW participant) could talk underwater. If you give her a moment she'll follow you around and talk your ear off. Recently she did some work experience in an aged care home, and well, she met her match. She actually came to me after her work experience and said 'Ash, I know how you feel now when I follow you around and talk to you because I worked with a lady on work experience who talked more than me!'









PACE GETS THE GREEN LIGHT

“STUDIES SHOW THAT BUILDING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN FAMILIES, PARENTS AND SCHOOLS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN’S LEARNING LEADS TO BETTER LEARNING OUTCOMES”

The Australian Government has provided funding for the youthconnections.com.au Parental and Community Engagement (PaCE) program to operate in schools on the Woy Woy Peninsula.

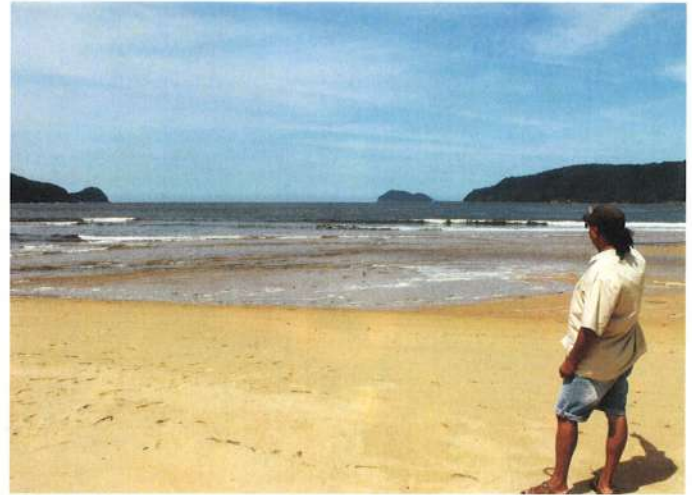
Funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, PaCE is a community driven program supporting parents and carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to be engaged in their children’s education.

The PaCE program will operate out of Brisbane Water Secondary College Woy Woy and Umina Campus, Ettalong Public School, Empire Bay Public School, St John the Baptist School, Umina Public School, Woy Woy South Public School and Woy Woy Public School.

“Studies show that building effective partnerships between families, parents and schools to support children’s learning leads to better learning outcomes,” says PaCE coordinator Scott Campbell.

PaCE will support current parent and community engagement initiatives already being operated by schools, and will also deliver workshops to parents, carers and the Aboriginal community to assist with the development and growth of skills in leadership, computer technology and public speaking.

“These workshops will not only help participants to engage positively and actively within the education system but will assist them in other areas of their lives, in turn helping the community and improving educational outcomes for our children and young people,” Scott says.



TO GIVE AND TO LEARN

This year, Nyanga Walang tours have been busy delivering a unique service to the Central Coast offering Aboriginal Cultural experiences on Darkinjung country.

‘Nyanga Walang’ means ‘to give and to learn’ and promises to provide a hands-on Aboriginal experience as participants touch, see, hear, smell and taste everything Nyanga Walang has to offer.

Youthconnections.com.au’s Cultural and Heritage Officer Gavi Duncan facilitates the tours using his wide knowledge of the Darkinjung land and Aboriginal cultural practices.

Gavi says, “Aboriginal history is everyone’s history. To know one’s self is to be whole within. Being one with your universe is self-healing.”

“Cultural educational learning is important for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in strengthening their spiritual connections and identity.”

Nyanga Walang Aboriginal tours operate in partnership with Koori Connect, youthconnections.com.au.

The partnership aims to educate Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. It offers employment and training opportunities to Aboriginal youth allowing them to learn and showcase their culture, strengthen their identity and gain experience in the tourism industry.



IMPROVING EDUCATION THROUGH SPORT AND CULTURE

“ I BELIEVE THE BEST WAY TO GET KIDS TO SCHOOL AND TO WANT TO LEARN, TO WANT A BETTER EDUCATION, IS THROUGH THE USE OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION, SPORT AND CULTURE ”

Koori Sports is a successful program run by the youthconnections.com.au Koori Connect unit to establish a connection between sport and the cultural identity of Aboriginal youth.

A number of schools are involved in the program including Narara Valley High School, Kincumber High School, Brisbane Water Secondary College Woy Woy Campus, Brisbane Water Secondary College Umina Campus, Henry Kendall High School and Gorokan High School.

Koori Connect Sports Coordinator Mitchell Markham says the program highlights the positive role that sport can have in Aboriginal society.

“I think there’s a strong connection between making school an active learning environment for Indigenous students and retention rates. I believe the best way to get kids to school and to want to learn, to want a better education, is through the use of physical education, sport and culture. Things that will get them involved in the classroom will make school a place that Aboriginal students can connect with and I want to support this process.”

Components of the program aim to get Aboriginal students active and to celebrate healthy lifestyles. Events include the Traditional Indigenous Games Training (TIGT), which was held

in September, 2012. TIGT provided participants the opportunity to experience aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture through physical activity, helping them to learn about and enjoy traditional games and sports.

As well as hosting competitive events, the Koori Sports program facilitates learning days such as the Deadly Young Aboriginal Surf Program. A fun and successful day of soft boarding and learn to surf lessons was held at Umina Beach in December 2012 and January 2013.

More recently the program has established the Boomerang Shield. The Boomerang Shield is an all school’s Oztag tournament aimed at encouraging young people to make positive and healthy lifestyle choices.

The tournament is an initiative of the youthconnections.com.au Koori Connect unit and contributes to the Australian Government’s Close the Gap campaign.

It attracted over 200 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students across the Central Coast and is a partnership between Narara Valley High School, Gosford City Council and Central Coast Junior Oztag.

The Boomerang Shield is proposed to be an annual event and the team hopes to continue the celebration of cultural identity through sport and physical activity for years to come.

The Koori Connect team has supported young Aboriginal sporting teams from the Peninsula in competitions such as the Koori Knock Out, Tuesday night Oztag competition and the 2012 Ella 7s.



YOUTH-LED FORUM EMPOWERS YOUNG ABORIGINAL VOTERS

“ YOUNG AUSTRALIANS ARE CURRENTLY UNDER-REPRESENTED IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS ”

The youthconnections.com.au Central Coast Aboriginal Youth Reference Group and the Australian Electoral Commission delivered a powerful message to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at the Youth Listening to Youth forum in April 2013.

The forum marked its place in Australian history as the first youth-led forum aimed at encouraging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to enrol to vote and was attended by more than 50 Central Coast high school students.

Director of the Australian Electoral Commission's Indigenous Electoral Participation program Mr Bob Eckhardt says young Australians are currently under-represented in the electoral process.

"If young Australians, especially young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders remain under-represented their voices won't be heard and they'll miss out on contributing to the decision-making affecting them and their communities."

"With a federal election scheduled for September this year, it is important that young people enrol to vote and have their say."

"The Electoral Commission is proud to support the Youth Listening to Youth Forum," Mr Eckhardt says.

"It is an important initiative to encourage young people who are confident about taking a stand on issues and who will take lead in developing community-based responses to challenges and in promoting reconciliation."

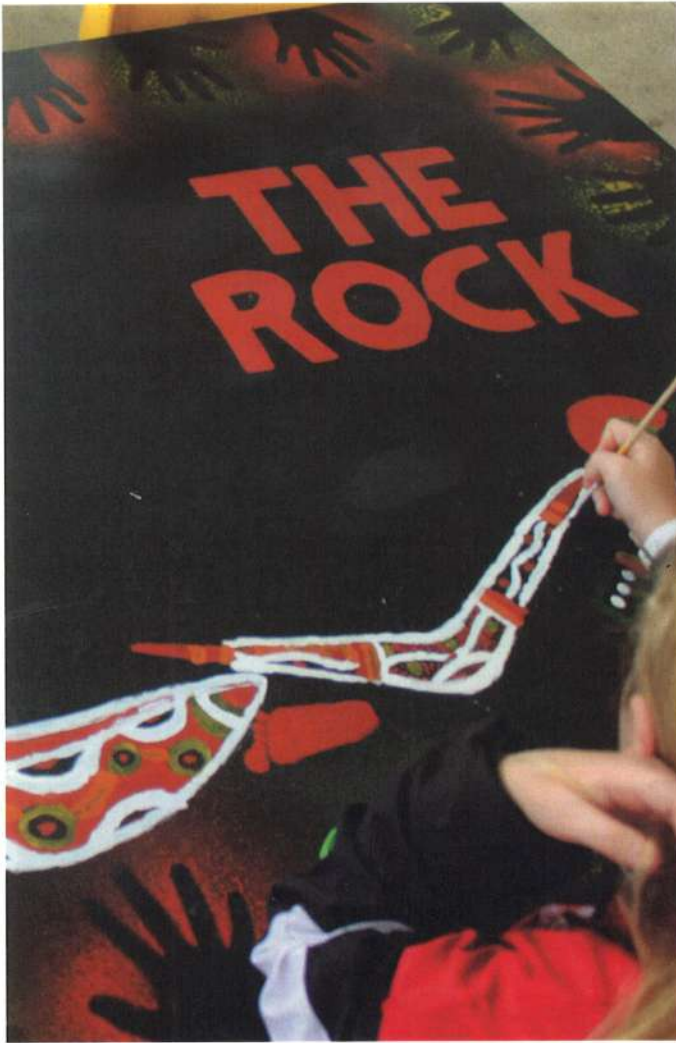
"The Commission would like to see similar events in other communities," he adds.

Member of the Aboriginal Youth Reference Group Shahn Wellington says the forum was successful based on feedback from participants.

"The forum received excellent feedback from students who expressed they are now inclined to participate in voting and take the information home to their parents encouraging community participation," she says.

Jaleesa Donovan, who sat on the 2012 National Indigenous Youth Parliament was also present.

The forum was a partnership between the youthconnections.com.au Koori Connect unit, the Central Coast Aboriginal Youth Reference Group, the Australian Electoral Commission and Sydney Leadership and is expected to roll out across the state.



OFFERING ABORIGINAL STUDENTS CONNECTION TO CULTURE

Cultural Affirmation programs, run by Koori Connect throughout Central Coast schools, provide case management and youth work with Aboriginal youth who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging from education.

These programs are run by Aboriginal Cultural and Heritage Adviser Gavi Duncan who dedicates himself to providing an opportunity for his students to grow and learn about their heritage, giving them the skills to engage and share with others.

Participating schools include Wyong High School, Wyong Public School, Gorokan High School, Wadalba Community School, Kariang Mountains High School, Narara High School, Henry Kendall High School, Kincumber High School and Tuggerah Lakes Secondary College with up to 40 students from each school involved.

"We've created what I call Aboriginal cultural learning spaces within schools, starting natural gardens that include bush foods and medicines," says Gavi.

"It creates a strong identity place for Aboriginal students within the school, they can hang out there or gather there. It's really something they can connect to."

"Other students can connect too which means they can learn and understand a lot more about Aboriginal history and culture. It breaks down barriers as we get non-Aboriginal students

involved in building and creating the space. The cultural learning spaces are an important thing within schools," he adds.

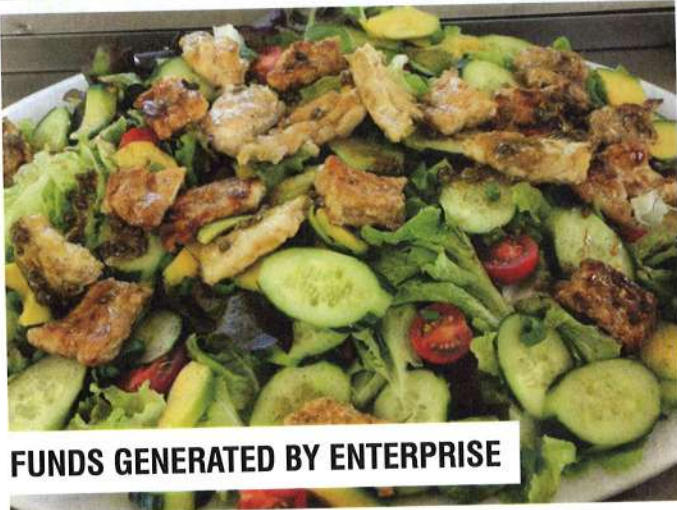
Gavi believes the responsibility falls upon the youth of today to change the negative perceptions of Aboriginal people. He recognises the potential for institutionalised learning as a platform for cultural reform.

"Through such community programs acceptance becomes easier and understanding is shaped, leading to a more equal society for everyone," he says.

"We've developed an Aboriginal Cultural Education program within Nyanga Walang teaching rock art, spirituality, dance and song. Schools decide on which cultural activity they wish to participate in."

"Having worked with so many schools over the years I have found that around 80% of our Aboriginal youth are disconnected with their culture and their identities. There is a large call for us to help our kids to bridge those disconnections and the Cultural Affirmation programs are a great progression towards embracing their heritage," he says.

"I have found these disconnections to have an adverse effect on their personal lives and overall schooling which is a dispossession our community cannot afford."



FUNDS GENERATED BY ENTERPRISE



“ WHEN I RETURNED I DISCOVERED THE STUDENTS HAD LACED THE TRAYS WITH CLING WRAP AND PUT THEM INTO THE OVEN. THE RESULT WAS MELTED PLASTIC MUFFINS ”

Former Manager of The Coolamon on Green Central Hayley Hardcastle cringes as she recalls some of the kitchen mishaps of the past. What may have lost you your job in a commercial kitchen is treated as a learning opportunity in what we call 'the second chance café'. Unlike most mainstream cafés, The Coolamon provides a supportive environment for hospitality and barista students to gain confidence without the pressure of a full commercial café.

"We give students the support they need until they are ready to handle the intensity of a mainstream café," Hayley says.

Not only does The Coolamon provide hospitality and commercial cookery training to students and trainees, it also provides catering for functions, business breakfasts, work lunches and morning teas.

"We've catered for up to 100 guests, dishing up gourmet sandwiches and native cuisines, including kangaroo meatballs

and crocodile salads," says current Coolamon Manager, Sarah Hardcastle. "It isn't easy catering for large numbers of people, but it's a great experience for those students onsite who are training."

The Coolamon gets a lot of its ingredients from the Green Central garden, which produces an abundance of fresh fruit and vegetables. "There's so much good stuff," says Sarah. "Every Wednesday we hold a Market Day where our students pick, price and sell produce with all funds raised going toward the YC programs."

Besides achieving its main purpose as a training facility, The Coolamon has also become a meeting place and a laid-back and inviting environment. The café is used by the Aboriginal community to yarn and talk business, by YC staff to mingle and talk work and by young people to socialise and take advantage of the daily student specials.

The Coolamon on Green Central is a social enterprise initiative providing employment, training and work experience opportunities for local young Aboriginal people who need additional mentoring and support to become economic and social participants in our community.



YG CONSTRUCTION PROVIDE HEADSPACE WITH A MAKEOVER

In 2013, headspace appointed local business, yG Construction to carry out a refurbishment of its headquarters in Maitland.

Work began in January at the headspace headquarters, where around 20 employees are based, with enhancements to the office space and improvements to client facing areas.

The administration office was remodeled to create a more welcoming and attractive reception area and the client and meeting rooms also received a makeover. New bathrooms were installed along with new kitchen facilities.

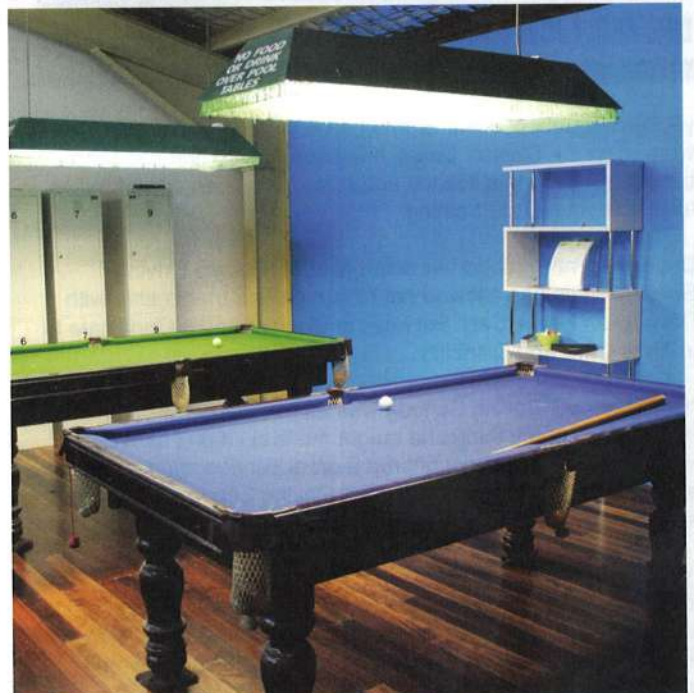
yG Construction secured the contract for the work after impressing headspace officials with its refurbishment of the headspace Gosford headquarters in 2011 and the Samaritans office in Adamstown in 2012.

Local apprentices, subcontractors and trade school students worked on the job in conjunction with yG Construction.

As well as office refurbishments, yG Construction has also undertaken renovations for clients including building a deck and pergola, repairing and replacing a kitchen and renovating a bathroom and laundry.

The company has also secured ongoing work for local Indigenous dance college NAISDA.

yG Enterprise Pty Ltd is a registered business offering services in concreting, landscaping, shop fitting, carpentry, general maintenance and labour hire all carried out to Australian standards and the building codes of Australia. All funds generated are used to employ young people facing barriers to employment.



CLIENT TESTIMONIAL

yG Enterprise Pty Ltd - Construction

CLIENT 5/10/2012

I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to Karl Wallace and his team for the outstanding workmanship, communication and results achieved in the process of renovating my elderly mother's bathroom.

Her bathroom needed disability modifications and these had become more urgent after a lengthy stay in hospital.

Karl and his team were at all times reliable, prompt, attentive and extremely helpful enabling my mother's fast return to her own home.

This has made a huge difference to my family and my mother's lifestyle for which I am very thankful to yG Enterprise Pty Ltd. I would not hesitate to recommend them to others in the future.

- Bronwyn Lowe



DRIVER LICENCE OPENS DOORS

yG Driving School client Briana Lewis, a 24-year-old Aboriginal woman on the Central Coast, has experienced first hand the benefits of gaining a licence and how it can open opportunities for employment and training.

Briana recently gained her driver licence with yG Driving School, which has allowed her to complete a traineeship with Daramulan Home Care Services in Gosford and a Certificate III in Aged Care and Disability.

"Ron (from yG Driving School) was an excellent instructor, there are so many things he taught me that I didn't already know. yG Driving School offered a great service and Ron allowed me to do my test in the yG Driving School car, which was wonderful," Briana says.

"yG Driving School is really cheap and young people going for their licence can easily afford a couple of lessons a fortnight," she adds. "Driving lessons gave me extra confidence. I now have my own car; I ended up buying the same car as what I used at yG Driving School."

yG Driving School is a social enterprise of youthconnections.com.au, offering affordable lessons at \$45 per hour in a modern training vehicle with professional instructors.

The professional driving school services the Central Coast offering learner drivers the skills and knowledge to pass their provisional driving test.

Briana says she is incredibly grateful for the opportunity to gain her licence and change her life. Without a licence she wouldn't be able to visit clients and take them to appointments – a requirement of her employment.

Before a licence, Briana struggled to do tasks independently as she relied on public transport to get around the Central Coast.

On school days Briana would walk half an hour to the local primary school to drop off her 9-year-old son. On rainy days, the walk would take up to an hour, the pair taking shelter beneath trees to stop themselves getting wet.

"My future would be very different if I didn't have my licence," Briana says.

CLIENT TESTIMONIALS

yG Enterprise Pty Ltd - Events and Catering

MARS

The Green Central facilities are great with a choice of two different sized comfortable rooms. The location is easy to get to and has a nice outlook over the surrounding bush.

The service is very good. Friendly staff and contacts. Everything you need can be provided to deliver presentation styled training or team meeting information. All staff are willing to help in any way.

The catering services are more than sufficient. There are a number of options around meals and morning and afternoon tea, from dining at the café on site (The Coolamon) to having platters delivered to you in the meeting room. The food is tasty and very reasonably priced. It's good to know the meals are prepared by young people learning to be chefs.

Overall I am very happy with the facilities and services provided and I am definitely going to be using Green Central again for my next off-site team meeting.

- Mark Laundess

BENEVOLENT SOCIETY

The facilities at Green Central are absolutely awesome. The feeling you get when you first walk through the gates is a strong sense of calmness and spirituality; the natural surroundings make this facility such a nice place to work and have fun! You leave feeling energised and refreshed.

The services provided by staff at Green Central are amazing. What they do for the young people and community is priceless. They are friendly, easy to approach and always smiling!

The Coolamon café would have to be the most deadly place to have a feed. The food is fresh and delicious. Yummo. Keep up the great work everyone!

- Megan Cain-Bugeia

THE AUSTRALIAN ELECTORAL COMMISSION

The facilities at Green Central are second to none. Absolutely fantastic facilities including conference room, catering, organisation and media team. Everything was fantastic.

All of the staff at youthconnections.com.au are incredibly helpful – bringing their skills and drive to our collaborative event. More and more staff members came forward and contributed their expertise to make a great event for us all and all of our stakeholders.

The Coolamon catering service is superb, delicious and again, second to none! Thanks to Sarah and all of the catering staff. Keep up the great work!

- Beth Parkin



HORTICULTURE: A FLOURISHING OPPORTUNITY

“ THE STUDENTS HARVEST THE PRODUCE FOR MARKET DAY AND THE CAFÉ STAFF COLLECT IT FROM THE GARDEN AS THEY NEED IT ”

Since it was established in 2010, yG Horticulture has provided training and employment opportunities to hundreds of local young people, allowing them to develop skills in horticulture, landscaping and conservation and land management.

“yG Horticulture employs four trainees and one school-based trainee and provides training for up to 10 TradeStart students a week. We also host work experience and work placement students,” says horticulturalist Tony Wells.

yG Horticulture trainees have the option of completing accredited qualifications in either horticulture or conservation and land management and are given hands-on experience at the Green Central site and local bush regeneration sites.

The Green Central site provides appropriate training opportunities for young people, who are required to assist with the maintenance of the flourishing garden, hothouse and hanging swamp situated close to the site.

In 2012, yG Horticulture installed an aquaponics system in the hothouse allowing vegetables and fish to grow. According to Tony, the aquaponics system provides learning opportunities for young people who are actively involved in the management of the system.

“The aquaponics system is the first thing I show the trainees and the TradeStart and work experience students. They all have an understanding of the systems and how to maintain them,” says Tony.

The aquaponics system is used as an educational tool and also churns out a variety of fresh produce, which is harvested for Market Day and used in dishes served in The Coolamon.

“The aquaponics system allows us to harvest fresh produce, which at the moment consists of a variety of lettuce species and will soon include tomatoes and cucumbers.”

“We also produce a variety of herbs, silver beet, broccoli and snow peas, and that’s only to name a few. The students harvest the produce for Market Day and the café staff collect it from the garden as they need it.”

As well as training at Green Central, young people are given training at local revegetation sites, which for the past 18 months have been predominately funded through Wyong Shire Council and the Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority.

Contracted work includes revegetation projects at Mardi, Palmdale, Palm Grove, San Remo, Little Jiliby and Watanobbi.

In 2013, yG Horticulture also received funding from the Tuggerah Lakes Small Grant Program to remove lantana at the Forest of Tranquility.

“The Forest of Tranquility was a fantastic training ground,” says Tony. “It would be great to be able to keep using it to teach young people weed control techniques.”

In 2012, youthconnections.com.au received \$20,000 to restore the ecological health of a hanging swamp and surrounding plant communities. The hanging swamp, located at Green Central is used as a training ground for young people to learn about restoration and management.



STUDENTS ESSENTIAL KEY TO MECHANICAL WORKSHOP

“ FROM AN EMPLOYER’S PERSPECTIVE IT ALLOWS YOU TO SEE WHAT THE STUDENT IS LIKE BEFORE EMPLOYING THEM ”

yG Mechanical is a social enterprise providing employment, training and work experience opportunities for local young people who require a soft entry point to the labour market and who need additional mentoring and support to become economic and social participants in our community.

yG Mechanical hosts up to three TradeStart students a week under the supervision of qualified mechanic Paul Carey and operates out of a fully equipped workshop providing vehicle repairs and servicing.

TradeStart students assist in servicing the vehicles, get to know the tools and how to use them, sweep floors and do general cleaning jobs.

Paul says that TradeStart student Dom is a standout student with a keen interest in automotive.

“He has a keen attitude, he’s consistent, and he listens and remembers what I tell him. I’m going to try to help him get some work experience with another employer.”

Paul says that giving young people work experience is important to help them decide if it’s what they want to do.

“It might not be what it seems or what they thought it would be. From an employer’s perspective, it allows you to see what the student is like before employing them.”

When the students finish working at yG Mechanical, Paul says that he hopes they understand Work Health and Safety, how to use tools and the importance of being reliable.

“Sometimes we are really relying on the students to turn up. They are very important to us.”

16-year-old Dom joined the TradeStart program when his school teachers suggested it would be a better option for him.

Dom says he likes cars and wants to be a mechanic, having learnt a little bit of everything from Paul including how to replace radiators.

“I like Paul, he’s a nice guy. He explains things,” Dom says.

Through the TradeStart program Dom hopes to get an apprenticeship in automotive. He works hard outside of the TradeStart program with a casual job at McDonalds on nights and weekends.

Of the TradeStart program he says, “A lot of people that are here are interested in getting a job and don’t know where to start. My advice is to just start looking.”



TRADESTART OFFERS STUDENTS A CHANCE TO CHANGE THEIR FUTURE

“ MY ADVICE TO THE STUDENTS ENROLLED IN THE PROGRAMS AT YC IS TO PUT THEIR HEAD DOWN, WORK HARD AND LOOK FOR A JOB. IT’S CHANGED MY LIFE! ”

Former TradeStart student Jade Bain, a young Aboriginal woman from Wyoming, says she was unsure about her future before joining the TradeStart program.

“I didn’t know what to do with my life. I thought about signing back into school but had already missed too much of year 11.”

After joining TradeStart, Jade had a clearer vision of her future and a goal to work towards. Jade wanted to continue with education and find employment.

TradeStart is an alternative learning program giving students the opportunity to study preliminary HSC units, work toward a qualification and participate in employment generating activities.

The program is a partnership between youthconnections.com.au, Erina High School and NSW Department of Education and Communities.

The program allows students to gain trade experience in a variety of industries including administration, graphic design, horticulture, automotive, construction and hospitality.

“I did hospitality training at The Coolamon and learnt how to cook, serve customers and operate barista. I worked in both front and back of house giving me diverse experience.”

TradeStart is an adult learning environment with teachers, case workers and trades people all available to support and mentor the students.

“The teachers were always very supportive. I found the school work easy and the teachers would always explain it to us in a way that was easy to understand,” Jade says.

During her time in the program, Jade attended the annual Indigenous Jobs Market, where she found a traineeship opportunity with NSW Family and Community Services – Ageing, Disability and Home Care.

“Debbie from the Independent Employment Adviser program was helping me look for work experience but while we were at the Indigenous Jobs Market we found a traineeship in Aboriginal Home Care. She helped me to apply for the job and prepared me for the interview.”

After attending an interview, Jade was offered an Aboriginal Home Care traineeship, which included driving lessons.

“Everybody at my new job is really nice, they tell me what to do. I do my driving lessons with yG Driving School and can practice driving in work hours, which is really helpful. I’ve done 50 hours so far. I really look forward to my driving lessons, I wake up every Thursday excited and happy because I get to drive.”

Jade was invited back to youthconnections.com.au to talk to current students in the TradeStart, Connectors and Transition to Work programs and encouraged them to put in an effort to see the rewards.



YOUNG PARENTS PROGRAM OFFERS LIFE-CHANGING OPPORTUNITIES

“ I’M GOING TO BE A MIDWIFE, I’M GOING TO TREAT ALL PEOPLE WITH RESPECT AND EQUALITY ”

Skye Warren fell pregnant at 16 years of age. At 16 she was also kicked out of home and left to raise a child on her own. She not only had to find her own way as a young mother but also faced extreme prejudice.

“When I was younger and on my own I was very lonely. It was very hard and I was very lost. I knew that I had to look after (my son) Mason and my main priority was his wellbeing,” Skye says.

Skye joined the Dale Young Parents Program, which operates from Wadalba Community College. The program is an alternative school for young parents and expecting teenagers, a partnership between St Philip’s Christian College Gosford, Wadalba Community School, youthconnections.com.au, and the Federal Government providing Communities for Children funding through The Benevolent Society.

This program offers courses for Year 9 - 12 students working towards their HSC. There’s an onsite crèche and workshops on parenting, lifestyle skills and nutritional cooking.

“I have always had people telling me that I had wasted my life. For a long time I thought I was in the Dale Young Parents Program to prove them all wrong. But after a year and a half in the program, I’ve realised I’m doing it all on my own and I’m doing it for my kids,” Skye says.

After completing her HSC through the Dale Young Parents Program, Skye hopes to go to university to become a midwife – a choice based on her own life experience.

“When I was pregnant with Mason, because I was so young, I

had a lot of prejudice against me. (The midwives) were horrible to me, they made me cry every single night.”

“I suffered very bad depression, but nobody looked at that side of it, nobody thought ‘I wonder what she’s going through, I wonder how this happened’. After that point I said to myself, I’m going to be a midwife, I’m going to treat all people with respect and equality.”

Now 19, Skye also has a six month old daughter Scarlett with her current partner Aaron, who she says is very supportive and treats Mason like his own too. Aaron also encouraged her to get her licence, which she did.

Skye says Scarlett smiles from the time she opens her eyes to when she closes them and is trying hard to crawl. Mason has just turned two and loves cars and his little sister.

Any spare time Skye has is spent with her children as she wants to be the best mum she can be. Even though some days are very tough, she is proud of what she has accomplished through the Dale Young Parents Program.

The program not only helps with education but also helps these young parents deal with situations that arise for any parents raising young children, such as behaviour issues and setting routines.

Skye says the Dale Young Parents Program teachers have encouraged her to keep going and to support others. She especially tries to support other young mums in the program who are 16 or 17 because she has been in their shoes.

“People told me I would never finish my HSC. I have a beautiful two-year-old boy and six month old girl and I will finish my HSC in October this year and next year I plan to go to uni. That’s all because of me.”



PARENTS LEARN TO CONNECT WITH TEENAGERS

A free public parenting forum was held in May 2013 for parents seeking creative strategies to support and communicate with their adolescent children aged 11 to 19.

The forum was hosted by youthconnections.com.au and Regional Youth Support Services (RYSS) at RYSS Gosford and is a pilot initiative.

Internationally renowned clinical and organisational consultant Steve De Groot facilitated the forum offering parents advice on how to connect with their teenagers.

RYSS Manager Kim McLoughry says the forum was very successful with 35 parents attending.

"Parents who attended the forum were so enthusiastic about the two hour session they believe it should be extended to a full day, as it provided them with insightful information and reassurance," she says.

Parents noted the information was conveyed with sensitivity, understanding and compassion. They also said that it would help them communicate with their teenagers and that the perspective of the adolescent was very eye opening.

Youthconnections.com.au Team Leader Linda Thomas says new challenges have emerged with the rise of the internet and social media sites making it more difficult for parents to connect with their teenagers.

"Parents are facing more and more issues such as cyber bullying and increased use of drugs and alcohol. They often ask for advice and support and this is what this well-received forum provided."

"We hope that this will be the first of a series of parenting forums providing them with information, confidence and tools to build strong and loving relationships with their teenagers."

Mr De Groot will also host an interactive workshop at youthconnections.com.au's Green Central site for experienced case managers already practising a strength-based approach with clients.



INVOLVEMENT WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Youthconnections.com.au held a market stall at the 2013 Going Off At The Swamp (GOATS) Family Festival held at Koala Park in San Remo, where more than 13,000 families and young people were present.

GOATS Family Festival traditionally opens Youth Week on the Central Coast and is the biggest Youth Week event in the area. The event showcases local and interstate performers and unveils the talents and passions of people in the community under the age of 25.

"There were more than 45 performances, rides, food and market stalls," says youthconnections.com.au Case Worker Rebecca Johnson. "Youthconnections.com.au held a market stall to advertise our services, which attracted hundreds of young people and their families."

"More than 100 young people collectively contributed to a blank canvas provided by youthconnections.com.au, showcasing their artistic abilities. The final product is an awesome artwork, which is now hanging in the Hub at Green Central," she says.

As well as engaging young people with local services, the GOATS Family Festival provided the opportunity for local and interstate musicians to perform in front of a packed audience.

TradeStart student Tamara Gilbert MC'ed the event, revealing a hidden talent for public speaking which scored her the position of a regular MC at youthconnections.com.au's events, including a recent awards ceremony held for the Abilities, Connectors and TradeStart students.

The GOATS Family Festival was recognised at the Australia Day Awards as the Wyong Shire Community Event of the Year.



A STEP TOWARDS BETTER FUTURES

Mainstream education isn't for all young people. Young people who cannot cope with the traditional mainstream school culture find it difficult to stay in school long enough to complete a year 12 education or equivalent.

Josh Porteils, Amy Martin and Adam Blanch, three former students from the 2012 Connectors program, needed an alternative to mainstream education to remain engaged.

The trio joined Connectors in 2012 and successfully graduated from the program at the end of the year having consistently attended and engaged in education.

The Connectors program is a nationally accredited program offering an alternative year 10 to young people disengaged or at risk of disengaging from education.

Connectors aims to improve the economic and social well-being of disadvantaged young people by giving them access to educational and alternative learning opportunities and providing vocational learning activities.

The Connectors program helps students to develop employability skills through work experience and vocational activities.

All three students have gone on to join TradeStart, a year 11 learning option offering preliminary HSC units and the opportunity to attain a Certificate II in a vocational area of choice.

Josh Porteils graduated from Connectors and is putting in a solid effort in the TradeStart program. He did construction work experience last year with yG Enterprise Pty Ltd and this year he has been involved in a woodwork project where the students are making bird boxes.

17-year-old Josh has also undertaken a graphic design placement. He has performed so well at youthconnections.com.au that he received a certificate at this year's awards ceremony for the Connectors, TradeStart and Abilities students. The awards ceremony is an annual event to celebrate the achievements of our young people.

Josh says he has always wanted to be a carpenter and wouldn't have stayed in school, preferring to seek out a carpentry apprenticeship.

16-year-old Amy Martin graduated from the Connectors program in 2012 and has done trade experience in The Coolamon, which she says she prefers to doing schoolwork.

Amy says she would like to get work in childcare and has been looking for a job. She was unsure about her future before Connectors and says she is happy she joined the program.

Adam joined the Connectors program to finish year 10 and now that he has stepped up into TradeStart, he hopes to complete year 11 and get a trade.

Through youthconnections.com.au he has gained experience in automotive, horticulture, construction, panel beating, house painting and bricklaying.

Adam says that if other young people need help they should come to Connectors as it is an all round great place that can help.

Successful completion of the TradeStart program will assist students in the transition to further training or employment such as an apprenticeship or traineeship.



BICYCLES REFURBISHED AND GIVEN TO LESS FORTUNATE KIDS

Youthconnections.com.au and Central Coast Family Support coordinated a successful bicycle restoration project, utilising Transitions students to maintain and restore 20 BMX bicycles, which were then distributed to the less fortunate.

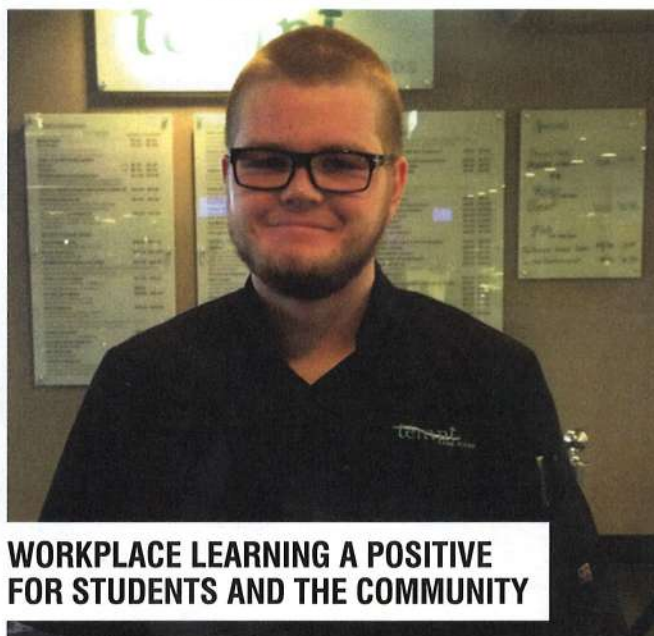
The bicycles were donated by the Rotary Club of Kariong and once restored were distributed by Central Coast Family Support Services to families in the Grandparents raising Grandchildren program.

‘It’s important to be able to give things to kids from families who normally wouldn’t be able to afford this type of bike. They are sturdy, well made and should last a while,’ says Kariong-Somersby Rotary’s Kerry Bayliss.

The project ran over four weeks, giving students the chance to learn the basics of bicycle restoration, before handing them over.

‘The project provided disengaged youth with meaningful work and the opportunity to help out in their community,’ says Partnership Broker Rosina Johnson.

The project was one of three community engagement programs run by youthconnections.com.au for Transition students, the others included the construction of a wood fired pizza oven and creation of a hanging garden.



WORKPLACE LEARNING A POSITIVE FOR STUDENTS AND THE COMMUNITY

Lake Munmorah High School student Jake Copley scored employment at ‘The Doylo’, Doyalson Wyee RSL Club after completing a hospitality placement whilst in year 12. He says that work placement not only gave him training in hospitality but also gave him more confidence and improved his communication skills.

Hospitality was a perfect fit for Jake who says, ‘Ever since I was a little kid I really liked cooking, I like how cooking brings people together and how it makes people happy.’

‘In year 7 or 8 when I started doing food technology I figured out I had a knack for cooking so I decided I may as well do something I’m good at, something I enjoy.’

Human Resources Assistant, Gabrielle Blanch says taking work placement students helps the RSL club in a positive way because they have a lot of really skilled chefs and staff. To pass that collective knowledge and skill on is a positive for the community.

Gabrielle has already recommended the work placement program to other employers and says that, ‘It’s great for kids to come and do work placement and then be able to move into the workplace already having that skill set.’

Jake says that he likes the environment of ‘The Doylo’ which is always happy and energetic with friendly co-workers.

He’s got some advice for other students undertaking work placement, ‘Always do the best you can, always show that you’re confident and always have a good attitude towards it.’

Youthconnections.com.au coordinates over 5,000 work placements for high school students on the Central Coast and in the Lower Northern Sydney region each year. Work placement is a mandatory component of industry-based Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses that students can choose as part of their studies for the NSW Higher School Certificate.

Students who undertake mandatory work placement have the opportunity to gain valuable skills and hands on experience in the workplace. Work placement can give students a taste of what it’s like to work in a range of industry areas including: automotive, business services, hospitality, retail, entertainment and construction.



BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR WORKFORCE ENTRY

After participating in a five-week brick and block-laying course, high school student Curtis Ingram landed himself a bricklaying apprenticeship.

Curtis was one of 13 participants to undertake the prevocational brick and block-laying course, coordinated by YC Industry Link Pty Ltd in conjunction with Hunter Institute of TAFE and the Australian Brick and Block Training Foundation.

He says that through the course he was taught what being a bricklayer entails and how physically demanding the work can be, which prepared him to enter the workforce.

"If I didn't do the course I wouldn't have known half the stuff I needed to know when onsite, so it helped me out a lot when I first started."

Curtis says that if he didn't sign up for the course he would still be looking for work on the Central Coast and now loves his apprenticeship, working and earning money.

He believes he gained his apprenticeship by working hard and showing that he really wanted to work.

YC Industry Link Pty Ltd ran the course at Green Central for Central Coast high school students wanting to gain entry-level

skills to get into the bricklaying trade.

The course offered practical work experience and offered students a pathway into the building and construction industry. Participants undertook five weeks of training and one week of work experience.

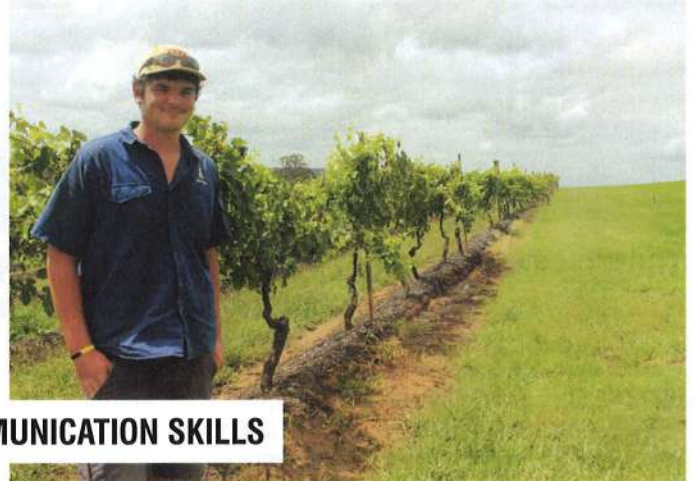
YC Industry Link Pty Ltd General Manager Marcus Watson says the students graduated from the course with accredited qualifications and industry skills.

"The students gained a Statement of Attainment and are now equipped with industry experience and an entry-level skills set."

"Two students gained an apprenticeship through the course and eleven students returned to school. It was a positive outcome for all participants."

Students attended from Tuggerah Lakes Secondary College Tumbi Umbi and Berkeley Vale Campus, Erina High School, Kariang Mountains High School, North Gosford Learning Centre and Henry Kendall High School.

The course was a pilot program with positive results and will be run again.



TRAINEESHIPS GROWING CONFIDENCE AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

17-year-old Aiden Earl started a school-based traineeship in horticulture under the Hunter Valley Indigenous Employment Program in 2011. Aiden is currently hosted by Bimbadgen Estate in the Hunter Valley where he is completing a Certificate II in Horticulture and studying for the Higher School Certificate.

"I found out about school-based traineeships through school. I didn't know anything about them at first but the school explained it to me and I decided that's what I wanted to do."

School-based traineeships provide students with the opportunity to attain nationally recognised Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualifications as well as their Higher School Certificate (HSC) and gain valuable work skills and experience through paid employment.

Successful completion of the Certificate II in Horticulture will provide students with skills and knowledge needed for the Certificate III in Horticulture or an apprenticeship.

Aiden's supervisor Allen Johns says he first heard about school-based apprenticeships and traineeships when YC Industry Link Pty Ltd contacted Bimbadgen Estate in 2011.

"I've seen Aiden's confidence and communication skills grow and it's good for us to be able to train and hopefully keep a young fellow interested in this kind of work," Allen says.

Aiden says that he didn't know anything about horticulture before he began the school-based traineeship but now loves it.

"I've learnt to prune the grape vines, fruit trees and flowering trees. I've learnt how to look after the gardens. I've learnt lots of skills that other students wouldn't have, it's definitely an advantage," Aiden says.

After finishing his Certificate II this year Aiden hopes to get full time work as a horticulturalist.

YC Industry Link Pty Ltd is a local Group Training Company employing and providing regular support to young people to successfully get through each stage of their apprenticeship or traineeship.

YC Industry Link Pty Ltd take care of the administration of trainees and apprentices including payroll, superannuation and insurance.



STRONG ENCOURAGEMENT FOR SCHOOL-BASED TRAINEESHIPS

“ THE FACT THAT SHE HAS PRIOR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE WORKPLACE IS A DEFINITE ADVANTAGE ”

YC Industry Link Pty Ltd is a local Group Training Organisation that employs apprentices and trainees and hosts them out to local businesses.

Throughout the period of their employment, YC Industry Link Pty Ltd provides regular support to ensure the young people successfully get through each stage of their apprenticeship or traineeship. YC Industry Link Pty Ltd caters to a variety of industries.

18-year-old Aboriginal woman Jasmin Samuel was employed by YC Industry Link Pty Ltd in 2012 as a school-based trainee and hosted out to Break Thru Wyong to complete a Certificate II in Business Services – Business.

Jasmin completed her school-based traineeship and her HSC and was then employed by State Training Services. She is currently undertaking a Certificate III in Business Services – Business, with YC Industry Link Pty Ltd her host employer.

School-based apprenticeships and traineeships allow high school students to work for an employer and train towards a recognised qualification while completing their secondary schooling and studying for their Higher School Certificate and/or ATAR.

Jasmin’s employer Danyel Stair from State Training Services says the school-based traineeship prepared Jasmin for the job. “Jasmin had already worked with an employer one day a week and she was already used to the work environment. The fact that she has prior knowledge about the workplace is a definite advantage.”

“Jasmin has made an excellent contribution to the organisation already. We feel she is going great. She’s really friendly and picks up things very quickly, following rules and policies. It’s only been a couple of weeks and she’s doing really well,” he adds.

Jasmin says the school-based traineeship gave her the experience necessary to transition to work.

“I have had previous experienced dealing with customers, answering phones, computer use and general admin duties such as filing and organising. This has given me confidence and made it easier for me to adjust.”

“I would strongly encourage doing a school-based traineeship as it prepares you physically and mentally for the workforce. You are given responsibility and I honestly think the skills you learn are essential to know before going into a full-time employment position,” she adds.

Jasmin says that the school-based traineeship is a great experience and she is grateful for the support she received.



GAINING INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE NOT AS EASY AS TURNING ON THE RADIO

For the majority of year 11 and 12 Central Coast students striving to become part of the entertainment industry, gaining work experience in a large production company without an industry contact is a struggle.

YC Media at youthconnections.com.au's Green Central offers a solution by providing work placements for many of these students, offering a range of programs in radio and television.

Nathan Pike from Northlakes High School as well as Clare Todovovitch and Jade Last from Lisarow High School undertook a one-week work placement with YC Media.

Jade says she knows entertainment is an industry she wants to get into when she leaves school so she hopes work placement will give her a head start when she goes to university, by providing more knowledge and experience in the industry.

The enthusiastic students are busy preparing a radio program titled Splendour Blender, which is centred on the Splendour in the Grass Festival.

The program will be comprised of songs by the headlining artists as well as commentary from the students. "I've been writing bios about the artists that we're featuring so hopefully we'll be able to include that," says Nathan, who has a strong interest in music.

The YC Media enterprise facilitates the one-week work placement, training students to produce a radio program and

develop skills in film, graphics and photography. All three of the students completed work placement with YC Media last year.

"We thought it would be the same but there's more now than there was last year. Because we have the background of what we did last year the radio show that we're making now is much better," says Clare.

YC Media boasts a new studio, edit suites and professional camera gear, all available to students to use with the supervision of industry professionals.

Clare and Jade both hope to enter the film industry after school, whilst Nathan wants to be a teacher. They say work placement with YC Media has taught them 'everything', such as editing, lighting and using specialised equipment.

"It's really fun, everyone here is really nice and helpful and you get a lot of your own time which is good," says photography-minded Jade.

"It's way better than school!" adds outgoing Clare. Nathan also speaks highly of the unique placement saying, "It covers lots of things that interest me in the entertainment industry."

Clare, who wants to get into acting, says she really enjoys gaining behind-the-scenes knowledge of the film industry and being a part of the production as opposed to just performance.

YC Radio is broadcast Monday nights at 7pm on CoastFM963.



DUNCAN MCFARLANE - Freelancer

Duncan was employed by YC Media in 2010 as a trainee in Screen and Media. He went on to film and assist with editing Freedom Ride 2011: The Documentary, and coordinate the Entertainment Work Placement program at YC Media. Duncan, now 21, is working as a freelancer for the McDonald Media Group.

So Duncan, tell us about your traineeship with YC Media?

I started off doing small video tasks, completing the majority of my training at the Bateau Bay studio. I worked in the recording studio and spent time designing the new studios at Green Central. I also worked on Freedom Ride 2011: The Documentary.

What were your experiences filming and editing Freedom Ride 2011: The Documentary?

It was a huge learning curve. I learnt film techniques, a lot of it by observing the first unit cameraman and learnt a lot about audio editing too. I learnt about Aboriginal history and culture, which was an eye-opening experience.

As well as being behind a number of large productions, you also facilitated large groups of Entertainment Work Placement students. What did you do with the students?

As well as helping the students to produce a weekly radio show for YC Radio, I placed students at the BMW

3 Series Launch at Worthington BMW Kariang, the Central Coast Cook Off and the Australian Youth Dance Festival. I also placed students at the Wyong Musical Theatre Company doing rigging and learning the operations. One of those students is now doing in-house lighting for the Wyong Drama Group.

As well as working for YC, you also had another job. What was your second job?

I was doing a lot of entertainment work, lots of concerts and gigs. When I first started I was setting up cables and consoles. I spent my spare time learning consoles so when I was on the job, thrown into it, I would actually know what I was doing.

How did you manage your time?

My full-time job (with YC Media) was my main priority, and I did what I could on weekends and nights. I tried not to let my second job interfere too much. It (the two jobs) became a sort of partnership, I'd borrow a lighting kit or PA from YC Media for my second job, and my boss would get a discounted rate. It's hard working two jobs. You need to manage it and make sure your employer understands that you're not on call for them, you need time and warning.

You've since departed from YC, what are you up to now?

I freelance now, but the majority of my work is with McDonald Media Group. I met them through youthconnections.com.au on a filming job.

As a freelancer, how do you get your name out there?

I have an ABN number and get my name out there through various people in the industry, including different film and entertainment contacts. They just call me up and say, 'Hey are you available to do a show?'

What skills have you taken from your traineeship and into your new role?

I've learnt management skills, being able to manage large groups of people.

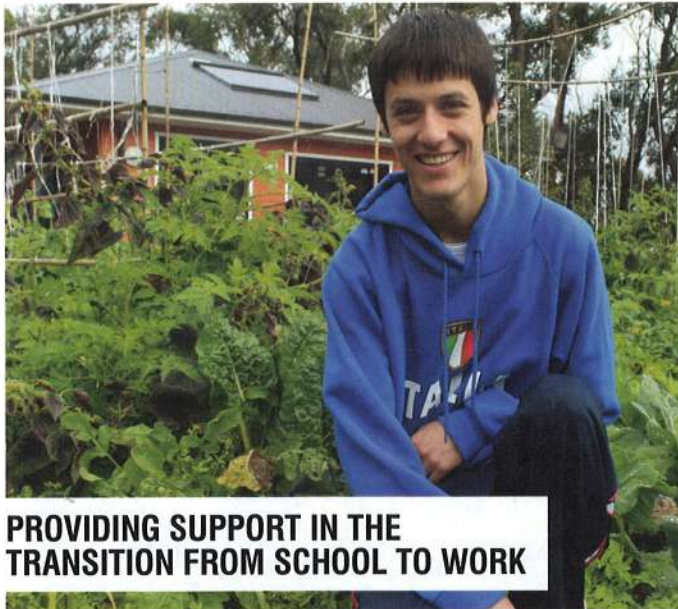
What did you accomplish at YC that you are proud of?

Being involved in the Freedom Ride and attending The Documentary launch at Event Cinemas, Tuggerah. I reckon that was one of my proudest moments knowing that The Documentary had my name on it. The trailer for the film was viewed worldwide.

What advice would you give to students wishing to get into the entertainment industry?

Start by interning and volunteering. You're not going to get paid unless you can actually prove to the employer that you know what you're doing and that you're worth the money. Start small, even if you're just a coffee or cable runner. Get your name out there.

YC Media has been operating since 2009 and is a multilayered enterprise providing work placements for high school students and offering a powder keg of programs for radio and television.



PROVIDING SUPPORT IN THE TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK

Joshua Oliver is the first Transition to Work (TTW) participant to gain employment after only four months in the program.

"As soon as I started the program Catherine (TTW case worker) gave me the tools I needed to get a job, including helping me with my resume. She also got me into a TAFE course to study horticulture," says Joshua.

TTW is a two-year program for year 12 school leavers with a disability who need support to make the transition from school to work or further education.

Joshua joined the program in 2013 with the hope of accessing further educational opportunities and gaining employment.

"I've always been motivated and willing to work. For the past three years I've had a part-time job at Woolworths and when I was younger I also ran my own mowing business."

Participants enrolled in the program are encouraged to undertake work experience in a range of industries to learn new skills and explore different pathways of interest.

Whilst in the program, Joshua enrolled in horticultural studies at TAFE and also began work experience with a local nursery to further his learning.

"At the nursery I put plants into pots, took the plants off the trucks and price tagged them."

Only weeks after starting work experience, Joshua scored a job interview with a local wholesale nursery and was offered a permanent part-time position.

Having successfully completed work experience and having received accredited qualifications at TAFE, Joshua proved a perfect candidate for the position.

"It feels good to have achieved something so quickly in the program."

Joshua says he is proud of what he achieved. If he could offer advice to other participants in the program it would be, "Set a goal and go for it. Don't give up."

The TTW program is funded by NSW Family and Community Services – Ageing, Disability and Home Care and operates from Green Central, Kariiong.



ART TO DEVELOP IMAGINATION

Transition to Work (TTW) Case Worker Ulrike Trappe is thrilled with the artwork being produced by TTW students this year.

"It gives me great happiness to see the young people appreciating their paintings," she says.

"Painting is an important practice as it forces the students to focus. By practising art regularly, they become good at it."

The program has produced many great achievers in the arts, having multiple participants selected for exhibition and even their finished products available to be purchased.

TTW participant Tiana Fulcher is one of 10 emerging Central Coast artists featured in the Digital Futures Art exhibition, held at the Gosford Regional Art Gallery in mid 2013.

The gallery showcased Tiana's artistic talent as well as the social skills she has learnt through involvement in the TTW program at the 'Meet the Artists' talk.

Including Tiana's achievement, the students have produced a number of artworks which have been exhibited in the Education Centre at Green Central for sale to the public.

These artworks were also entered in an art competition held at Gravity Youth Centre as part of National Youth Week.

TTW participant Mitchell Barton, a blossoming artist, won first prize at the art exhibition.

Mitch received a \$250 shopping voucher and received positive feedback from judges who described his artwork, titled 'Kindling a Fire', as having outstanding texture and colour.

Ulrike believes by practising art, students develop imagination and creative thinking processes.

"By practising art, the students are using the left-brain hemisphere, which releases creative imagination," she adds.

TTW staff encourage young people to become involved with community enterprise projects and provides links to other service providers and job placement services.



MATT MCCAUGHEY - Radio Producer & YC Media Volunteer

23-year-old Matthew McCaughey, a former Transition to Work participant, was first introduced to YC Media in 2010. While undertaking work experience, he displayed talent, natural charisma and humour, all ideal for radio. The life-changing experience has created YC Media's golden boy, a loyal volunteer and host of multiple radio programs.

How did you land work experience with YC Media?

The Transition to Work (TTW) program allows you to do various work placements. I approached the TTW coordinator at the time, Wilhelm, and asked him if I could do work experience in either IT or media and he suggested I go to YC Media. So, on July 13th 2010, I took a 40 minute bus ride to YC Media and what followed was something that would change my life.

Shortly after work experience you were hired as a volunteer. How did that pan out?

It's been about four years since I was officially made a volunteer at YC Media. The TTW program directed me toward a career that they thought I'd do well at and surprisingly it turned out to be true. I

feel like I owe a bit to youthconnections.com.au, the driving force, I just love the place so much. I've been affiliated with YC for six years now, it would be a very hard thing to say goodbye, if I ever had to.

As well as volunteering for YC Media you are also involved in a number of productions. What are they?

I host my own radio programs on CoastFM963, Indie Rock Café (Monday, 10pm), Melody Lounge every second Friday (6pm) and also assist with Kart 'N' Yarns every second Friday (7pm). I host an Australian radio program called Homebrew Radio, which is aired on community radio stations all across Australia. I am particularly proud of Homebrew Radio because it's not something YC Media had to push me towards.

In 2013, you assisted Transition to Work participants in making their own radio program. How does it feel to be teaching the program you started in and sharing your love of radio?

It's quite interesting to be on the other side of the spectrum for once, because for so long I was on the same side as the students, needing help and struggling to find my way. I feel a great sense of accomplishment that I have risen

above the struggles, become a producer of multiple radio shows and am now teaching students the way of radio and entertainment.

How do you motivate the students?

I bring them down to reality. Some of them freak out about hearing their own voice (recording) for the first time, which from a personal experience can be very scary. I just gently comfort them and say, 'Don't worry, we've all been there.' Eventually you get used to it and it's much easier. For example, after a recent session they've managed to record all the songs they want to put on the show and have already started script writing.

What are your future goals?

My ultimate goal is to take the Indie Rock Café community radio program, that I actually created and built up from the ground, and bring it to much bigger things. Maybe one day it will bring me an income. It's my dream to be able to say I actually built it up from the ground and turned it into something memorable.

After volunteering for YC Media for six years, Matthew landed his first paid job, producing audio content for an external client. You can check out Matt's radio programs Indie Rock Café (Monday, 10am) and Melody Lounge every second Friday (6pm) on CoastFM963.



SUPPORTING YOUTH WHEN THEY NEED IT MOST

The new Transition Support Program assists secondary school students with a disability by helping them to decide what they want to do when they finish school. Students are supported to develop their own personal transition plans that will set them on their way to achieving their post school employment, further education and training aspirations.

Transition Support provides mentoring to all participants and aims to encourage and give advice to those who are faced with big decisions to ensure they don't have to make them alone.

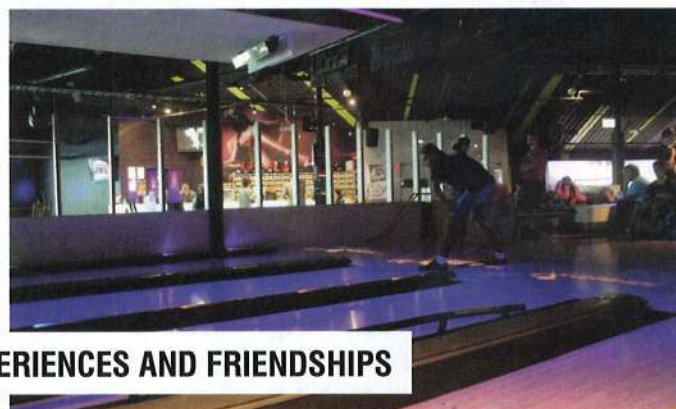
Youthconnections.com.au Support Worker Kim Moore says, "Participants are enrolled in a range of TVET Access courses including sign writing, automotive, furnishing, flooring, construction, car detailing and animal care as well as sport and recreation."

"They have achieved great outcomes gaining white cards and First Aid certificates and overcoming challenges with mainstream education by participating in alternative learning programs."

Youthconnections.com.au Support Workers liaise with students, family and the student's school to discover a student's strengths and interests, assist in finding work experience, provide information of upcoming expos or work opportunities and help students broaden their social networks.

The NSW Government has made a commitment under Stronger Together: A new direction for disability services in NSW 2006 – 2016 to improve transition planning for secondary school students with a disability so they can successfully transition from school to adult life. The Transition Support Program is a major contributing factor to achieving this goal.

The Program is a partnership between NSW Family and Community Services – Ageing, Disability and Home Care, NSW Department of Education and Communities, the Association of Independent Schools, the Catholic Education Commission and youthconnections.com.au. It currently operates in schools throughout Newcastle as well as Wyong High School and hopes to expand to more Central Coast communities.



EXCURSIONS PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH NEW EXPERIENCES AND FRIENDSHIPS

“ NOTHING STOPS HIM FROM GIVING THINGS A GO AND HE HAS A GREAT ATTITUDE TOWARDS LIFE ”

Youthconnections.com.au is proud to report the success of the Skool's Out and T-Team Vacation Care programs in 2012 and 2013. These programs provide peer support for young people with a disability.

The students have experienced a dynamic range of excursions enabling them to form new friendships, find new interests and provide them with the opportunity to have new experiences under the guidance and support of our experienced staff.

They have been to the Great Aussie Bush Camp, Shark and Ray Centre Port Stephens, M9 Laser Skirmish and Kingpin Bowling, Darling Harbour Sydney, the Sydney Tower Eye and the Oakvale Farm Fauna World, Port Stephens.

Program coordinator for Skool's Out and T-Team Rono Fleissgarten was especially happy with the excursion to the Shark and Ray Centre at Port Stephens.

"To see every student get suited up to swim with and feed the sharks, I was amazed that none of the students were actually

scared while sharks and rays up 3.5 meters long swam around them. Every student fed the array of sharks and rays and enjoyed every minute of the experience."

The excursions and camps create a new and foreign environment for students to grow and explore. Rono recalls living this unique experience of getting in the water with the sharks and rays with student Kallan who has cerebral palsy.

"Nothing stops him from giving things a go and he has a great attitude towards life," Rono says.

Parents are delighted to hear of the achievements by their children and are often overwhelmed by the extent of their accomplishments and experiences.

Students who participate in the Vacation Care excursion provide positive feedback and are constantly asking when the next camp will be.

Vacation Care excursions and camps give the T-Team and Skool's Out students the freedom to engage in activities and learning and have a great time whilst doing so.

Rono says that it's his favourite time of each term as he can see the smiles on the participants faces and hear their laughter.



BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES IN WYONG SHIRE



“ THIS IS COMPLETELY OUT OF THE BOX, THIS IS SOMETHING THAT NO ONE’S DONE BEFORE ”

The Better Futures Hub (BFH), an innovative centre maximising opportunities for economic and social participation of young parents and jobless families, is now underway with the lease having been signed for 2a Amy Close North Wyong with Henry Kendall Group.

BFH has been developed through a partnership between youthconnections.com.au, Better Futures, Local Solutions - Local Advisory Group Wyong, St Philip’s Christian College, Lighthouse Early Learning Centre, ET Australia, Henry Kendall Group and Benevolent Society.

The facility will offer Board of Studies education and accredited vocational training as well as an early childhood centre for children of young parent participants. Work experience and employment will be offered in early childhood education, business administration, events management and information technology, all onsite.

Youthconnections.com.au CEO Maggie MacFie says, “The child care centre will be able to accommodate up to 38

children, a school will accommodate up to 50 young parents and a model office will train and provide employment for up to 15 young people at a time.”

“The Hub will also provide an IT Hub and offer high-end video conferencing, all of which will connect young people to their broader community and provide them with a safe and beautiful place for young parents to learn and earn.”

“This is completely out of the box, this is something that no one’s done before,” Maggie adds.

The Better Futures Hub is a result of the Better Futures, Local Solutions government initiative that aims to provide opportunities for young parents and jobless families to gain skills and training, access new work opportunities and build better life outcomes for themselves and their children.

Better Futures, Local Solutions will also support communities to develop solutions to address disadvantage in their area, with Wyong being selected as an area to benefit from the initiative. “It’s probably the best chance we will ever have to shift a paradigm and to change people’s lives forever, I think everyone that was called on to the Better Futures, Local Solutions - Local Advisory Group has that exact same belief and same purpose,” Maggie says.



GENERATING A COLLECTIVE VOICE IN THE PROMOTION OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

The first forum of the Central Coast Alternative Education Alliance was held on Friday 14th June 2013 at the University of Newcastle Ourimbah Campus with over 40 people from the alternate education sector in attendance.

The Central Coast Alternative Education Alliance has been created to provide an authentic and collective voice in the promotion of alternative education in the Central Coast Region and is an initiative of the Partnership Brokers program of youthconnections.com.au in partnership with Regional Development Australia Central Coast and key leaders in the alternative education sector.

Keynote Speaker Dr Kitty Te Riele, Principal Research Fellow of the Victoria Institute for Education, Diversity and Lifelong Learning says, "The alliance is very important for the Central Coast in order to bring together the different groups that work to offer disadvantaged young people a better education."

There is a growing number of Alternative Education Providers on the Central Coast who deliver specialised education services for young people who are more suited to a flexible learning environment outside of mainstream schooling.

"If they all work together it allows people to share knowledge, help each other, solve problems and learn," says Dr Te Riele.

"On a practical level you are educated on alternative programs that may benefit the youth and open up more opportunities for them to succeed," she adds.

The aim of the alliance is to offer a platform that providers can share information on best practice, emerging issues and disseminate information on appropriate referral and support services across the sector.

Youthconnections.com.au Partnership Broker Rosina Johnson said that feedback from the forum was very positive and it was great to see key leaders in the sector come together to share their expertise and experience about working with young people in alternative education.



STEERING LEARNER DRIVERS

The youthconnections.com.au Youth Reference Group is the driving force behind a new learner driver mentor program.

yDrive is funded by NSW Government Youth Opportunities and NSW Transport and was created to address youth unemployment on the Central Coast.

The Federal Government identified Wyong Shire Council as one of the 10 most socially disadvantaged communities in the country. Gosford also has pockets of severe disadvantage. Due to the need to travel out of area for employment and the geographical layout of the region, many young people are unable to access employment due to transport limitations.

The yDrive program was created to give marginalised youth who do not have access to a car or licenced supervising driver the opportunity to gain their licence, a car and support to develop a career pathway and gain employment.

Through the program, young people who are financially, socially and geographically isolated are given access to driving lessons with a fully licenced driver who assist to guide their development as safe drivers.

As part of the program, specialist youth and employment consultants workers work with participants and mentors to build participants financial literacy, work on their self-esteem, resilience and self-efficacy, career planning and general employability skills.

yDrive received funding on the basis that it is a youth-led youth-driven community project. The Youth Reference Group were involved in developing the proposal and the strategies being used to support the young people participating in the project.

yDrive currently has 38 learner drivers in the program being supported by 13 mentor drivers.