



**YOUTH  
CONNECTIONS**  
COM.AU

# ANNUAL REPORT — 2014/15







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During 2015, youthconnections.com.au turned 20-years-old. It is an apt time to reflect upon the last two decades. We have experienced many evolutions in our service delivery, but what remains constant is our commitment to transitioning vulnerable youth to purposeful futures. This past year has seen us galvanise our long-term financial sustainability, to ensure we will continue to serve the youth of Australia with more vitality and innovation than ever.

From 31st December 2014, after four years delivering the successful Youth Connections program which supported young people at risk of disengaging from education and work, Youthconnections.com.au ceased the delivery of that contract in line with Federal government funding cuts.

Similarly, the cessation of funding of the Partnership Brokers program was a significant loss. This initiative brokered partnerships between education and training providers, community organisations, business and industry and parents and families to foster a strategic, whole-of-community approach in supporting young peoples' learning and development.

The government's decision to discontinue these programs was difficult for all providers, posing a disruption to service delivery. We concentrated on ensuring the sustainability of our core services to enable us to respond to complex community needs.

We remain strongly committed to creating opportunities for young people to participate economically, socially and civically in their communities. Our evidence-based, client-centred service delivery, coupled with an emphasis on collaborative early intervention and prevention, meant that Youthconnections.com.au was successful in continuing to provide innovative, specialist youth transition services throughout 2015.

We continued our delivery of disability services, youth transition services, an independent school and the social enterprises of a Group Training Organisation and Registered Training Organisation.

We expanded into new markets. We established highly successful deployable Work For the Dole projects which are now being delivered Australia wide. Operations range from Broome WA to Horsham Victoria.

We successfully and efficiently established a number of new social enterprises. All Things Finance is our first hybrid model; the first accounting firm co-located with a training college in Australia. The purpose of the enterprise is to offer a 'learn and earn' opportunity to students, facilitating work experience and seasonal employment.

Another social enterprise developed in the

year was Australian Landscapes. It was established to provide garden and lawn maintenance services to the market whilst providing opportunities for jobseekers to gain employment in a successful business.

Developing further social enterprises is a strategic priority for Youthconnections.com.au. The reason for this is two-fold. First, it is to ensure that we can offer employment and training pathways to the young people we serve. Second, the alternative revenue streams of social enterprise allow us to deliver our services that are unaddressed by government funding, yet essential to providing holistic support to our participants.

Our Links to Learning and Transition Support programs have been offered another year of funding, due to their outstanding outcomes. Given 2015 was the first year of delivery of these programs, this success bodes well for the future and we expect them to flourish further still.

The Better Futures Hub has remained core to our commitment to supporting the education, training and employment pathways of young parents and families experiencing long-term unemployment in the north of Wyong Shire. The place-based, collective impact model has received significant commendation from community and government alike.

As always, a key focus for the Board is to look forward and to ensure that youthconnections.com.au is well prepared to respond to emerging needs and challenges. Operationally, we have and will continue to focus on developing commercial solutions to meet the needs of our clients and a changing community sector.

We are extremely proud that despite the financial challenges we faced, we were able to achieve an underlying surplus for the year of \$0.5 million. This is emblematic of the significant progress we have made and of the growth and innovation that will define our future.

None of our work would be possible without the dedication of our staff, volunteers, supporters, partners, funders and the valuable contribution of our Board.

***Together we supported 8,000 youth on their journey to economic, social and civic independence. Thank you so much for your support. We look forward to the next 20 years together.***



I am extremely pleased to be able to report to you at the beginning of this Annual Report which I am sure you will have great pleasure in reading. Within its pages are described the many successes which have been achieved by our clients and their dedicated teachers, mentors and support staff across the wide range of programs which operate under the youthconnections.com.au banner. Especially pleasing is that these successes have been achieved in a difficult environment of economic restraint following the withdrawal of a substantial proportion of our funding by government. This has led to a down sizing of our organisation and we were very saddened to lose some of our most valued and dedicated staff members. Those staff members whom we have been able to retain have responded magnificently to our new situation with every one of them working far beyond their normal workload to ensure that our clients have not missed any opportunities or lacked any personal or educational support. This passion for their work and dedication to their clients by our staff members is what makes youthconnections.com.au such an extraordinary and valued organisation in the youth transition space. On behalf of the Board, I would like to sincerely thank and congratulate these wonderful people who have kept our organisation forging ahead in these difficult times.

At our last Annual General Meeting we welcomed three new Board members – Jon Stokes, Van Dissing, and Ali Akbarian. Adding their experience and expertise in business and finance to the diverse range of skills already present within the Board, they have been fundamental in sustaining and developing the organisation during this difficult year. As well as working together as a Board, individual Directors have also provided their individual expertise within the day to day working of the organisation and this has been greatly appreciated. I would like to particularly thank Marj Kong, who has acted as Executive Director within the organisation in the absence of a CEO, and Anne Byrne who has provided Human Resources services across the organisation. All Directors have also demonstrated their passion for the work that we do and as Board Chair I want to thank

them for this commitment and the time and expertise they voluntarily give to our organisation.

In the absence of a CEO throughout this year with our former CEO moving interstate, our part time Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Claudia Devlin, became full time this year and took on the role of Chief Operating Officer (COO) as well as CFO. This gave her an enormous workload, effectively leading the organisation, and she has performed these dual roles outstandingly, working closely with the Board, with her wonderful Managers, Andrea Cingi, Marcus Watson, and Liz McMinn and with the entire staff. Throughout December last year and January this year, the Board engaged in extensive interviews and presentations with Claudia around her work within the organisation and her vision the future of the organisation which resulted in a unanimous decision by them to appoint her as the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of youthconnections.com.au. The Board has every confidence that Claudia will lead the organisation into a bright new future and offer her our sincere congratulations.

A further momentous change which occurred this year was the move to independence of our Indigenous programs. In June, Bara Barang Corporation Ltd was formed to create a self-determined and empowered community to improve school retention, build leadership and promote vocational learning and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people. Youthconnections.com.au is very proud to have fostered the evolution of Bara Barang to independence and are pleased that our two organisations remain co-located at Green Central at Kariong and will continue to work harmoniously together. Our Board congratulates Bara Barang on this major step in their evolution.

Please take the time to read the wonderful stories in this Annual Report, and note in particular the development of each program to greater strength and diversity in support of our endeavours to ensure that every person who engages in them moves on towards purposeful futures. The Board again congratulates all who have contributed to this great achievement.



## **NG CENTRAL**

Ngaruki Gulgul (NG Central) is a dynamic, enterprise learning school for young people who need a new perspective on what it means to have skills and knowledge. Registered and accredited as a special assistance school with the NSW Board of Studies, NG Central offers Years 9, 10, 11 and 12 along with a vocational Certificate I qualification. Our dynamic curriculum incorporates hands-on activities, vocational training and creative learning to give students insight into the world of work and training. Staff are responsive to students' needs, aspirations and personal circumstances, and cultivate inclusivity and integrity as core teaching values.

## **YDRIVE**

yDrive is a learner driver mentor program that provided young people access to a supervising driver and vehicle as they worked towards achieving their probationary licence. The program utilised community volunteer 'mentors' and a qualified driving instructor via the affiliated driving school. The program ran from 2013-2015 and was funded by NSW Government Youth Opportunities and NSW Transport.

## **TRANSITION TO WORK**

Transition to Work is a diverse two-year program for school leavers with a disability, which equips participants with everything they need to kick-start their careers and engage with their community. Participants follow a customised, strength-based weekly program of activities which improve employability, work-readiness, communication, travel, time-management and life skills. Transition to Work is funded by the NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care.

## **TRANSITION SUPPORT PROGRAM**

The Transition Support Program assists senior high school students with a disability to visualise pathways to the career and life they want, devise actions to make it happen and broaden their social and professional networks. Support staff broker cross-sectoral partnerships and facilitate opportunities for further training, education, work experience and employment.

The program is a partnership between youthconnections.com.au, NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, NSW Department of Education, the Association of Independent Schools and the Catholic Education Commission. The Transition Support Program is funded by NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care.

## **TRANSCENDENCE**

'Transcendence- Gaming at its Best!' is a gaming hub welcoming young people with and without a disability. Holding Friday night gaming competitions, participants enjoy a safe, inclusive space where they can make new friends and test their skills in a social environment. Transcendence is brought to you by Northcott and is funded through FundAbility and the NSW Department of Family and Community Services.

## **TTEAM/SKOOL'S OUT**

T-Team is an after-school and vacation care program that packs a punch, for young people with a disability in the Gosford City and Wyong Shire regions. It offers inclusive activities that are recreational and educational and build confidence, social, communication and team-building skills. A small grant was received for computers and games through the NSW Department of Family and Community Services' FundAbility Program







## **YOUTH SUPPORT PLANNING**

Youth Support Planning is a holistic program for young people with a disability which empowers them to embrace their passions and vision for their own life. Support staff broker services and activities through both mainstream and specialist providers that align with participants' strengths and aspirations and offer counsel and advocacy around emerging trends in the sector and the NDIA.

## **THE SKILLS GENERATOR**

Launched as a collaboration between YC Industry Link Pty Ltd, yG mechanical, MTA, MCA and ABBTF. The Skills Generator delivers partnered pre-vocational training courses, Work for the Dole community projects, apprenticeships, traineeships and School-Based-Apprenticeships. The Skills Generator replicates industry-standard work environments for jobseekers to hone their skills in the vocational sector.

## **TRADE STAFF AUSTRALIA**

Trade Staff Australia is Youth Connections' Group Training Organisation. It connects industry employers with skilled apprentices, trainees and school-based trainees across the Central Coast, the Hunter, Northern and Western Sydney and the ACT.

## **STRUCTURED WORKPLACE LEARNING**

Structured Workplace Learning brokers work placements for Year 11 and 12 students studying vocational subjects. Each year, all students must complete a 35 hour placement with an industry employer. Youth Connections broker work-placement opportunities through an active network of employers across the Central Coast and North Sydney region and maintain strong relationships with all local schools and TAFEs. The program is funded by the NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training.

## **YC MEDIA**

YC Media facilitates work placements for students studying Entertainment on the Central Coast and in Sydney. It assists students to produce a radio program and develop skills in film, graphics and photography. YC Media has new studios, edit suites and professional camera equipment, all available to students to use with the supervision of industry professionals.

## **BETTER FUTURES HUB**

The Better Futures Hub is a place-based, collective impact innovation offering education, training and employment pathways to young parents, families experiencing joblessness and long-term unemployed. Young parents and families can access high quality early learning, receive social support, complete their Year 12, access childcare, discover vocational pathways and be mentored and assisted into employment.

Partners include: Better Futures, Local Solutions – Local Advisory Group, [youthconnections.com.au](http://youthconnections.com.au), St Philip's Christian College, ET Australia, Henry Kendall Group and the Benevolent Society. The Better Futures Hub is funded by the Australian Government Department of Human Services under the Better Futures, Local Solutions initiative.

## **ALL THINGS FINANCE**

All Things Finance, Australia's first Not-For-Profit accounting firm, is an affiliated social enterprise of Youth Connections. It provides the local community with comprehensive and affordable accounting, book-keeping and taxation services, with profits funnelled into Youth Connections programs. All Things Finance also provides quality work-placements to students interested in business administration and finance.



## ENTERPRISE ART

At NG Central (NGC), we give our students as many opportunities as possible to engage in kinaesthetic enterprise learning, which allows them to be creative, collaborate and express themselves in purposeful ways.

**THIS YEAR, STUDENTS HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN LANDSCAPING AND ART PROJECTS WHICH HAVE NOT ONLY MADE OUR SITE 100% MORE EYE-CATCHING, BUT PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRODUCTIVE CREATIVE EXPRESSION.**

Our outdoor hang-out area is looking amazing now that it has received some TLC from students and Conservation and Land Management trainer Ian Sutton. Students took on a range of landscaping, gardening, maintenance and construction duties and finished the space off with flair through creating customised NGC graffiti boards. Their enterprise art skills have grown exponentially under the talented supervision of NGC Support Team Coordinator Rick Corderoy and Case-Manager Beck Johnston.

'Transcendence- Gaming at its Best!' was an initiative of our Abilities team at Youth Connections and is a gaming hub for young people with a disability to mix and game with their mainstream peers. This new space onsite was crying out for a gamer-themed make-over and who

better to tackle the task than our tribe of aspiring street artists?

The students were responsible for the project from start to finish, dedicating time and effort to planning the graffiti mural, chalking up the initial sketches and spray-painting the art so it became a smorgasbord of colour and action. It was a hive of activity, with students quick to show off their work.

Year 9 student Danielle Morgan was certainly impressed with her teachers' street-smart skills.

"I drew up the Pickachu and Beck showed me how to improve it a bit- it came out really well in the end".

Rick noted the sense of ownership students had over the project.

"It's important for the students to feel accountable for something, and because this was a graffiti project with a purpose, they got to hone their skills and really took pride in the final product".

This successful project is an excellent example of NG Central integrating our students into the wider community of Youth Connections and Green Central, to foster a sense of belonging, accountability and pride.





## BREAK THE HATE

A significant focus for NGC this year was equipping our young people to respond to diversity with awareness and respect. We wanted to break down barriers our young people encounter that foster ignorance and hostility in our society.

To achieve this, NGC students and staff worked intensively on a video documentary project called Break The Hate. This was made against the backdrop of National Youth Week 2015, which focused on the theme 'It Starts with Us'. Our young people certainly took that challenge on as they met with local community members, including authority figures and people of different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Everyone came together at Green Central, for an afternoon of honest discussion on stereotyping and stigma and how we can work together to break down these barriers caused by misunderstanding and negative assumptions.

NGC Case Manager Beck Johnston was the mastermind behind the filming and editing of the documentary and a key facilitator on the day. She was incredibly impressed by how our students embraced the opportunity, despite being an experience many were encountering for the first time.

"I was extremely proud about how honest they all were and how respectful they were to our guests. They really took a lot away from it".

NGC students echoed this sentiment, with one student

acknowledging how quickly perspectives can shift when you engage in discussions rather than rely on stereotyping.

**"JUST SITTING HERE NOW AND HAVING A FIVE MINUTE CONVERSATION, IT CAN CHANGE YOUR OPINION COMPLETELY. IT REALLY MAKES YOU THINK ABOUT STUFF."**

Community member Nahid Mohamed spoke about the importance of mutual respect.

"I assume well of you, so I would hope you would assume well of me. It's a two-way street. I have a lot of faith in your generation and think that you are all open-minded, so I would love to approach youth at any opportunity to talk openly together."

The group also had a chance to speak one on one to further share their experiences and talk about how they could better communicate in the future.

"It definitely was a mutual exchange; our guests really connected with our students and that direct dialogue meant they could see young people in all their complexity, rather than as a stereotype" Beck said.

Thank you to our case managers, the community members who so generously took part and of course, to our young people who approached the day with open hearts and minds.

Check out our masterpiece at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDyaAym46R8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDyaAym46R8)



## NGC - SHANE

Shane Lennard is our resident administration whiz at Green Central, the primary site of [youthconnections.com.au](http://youthconnections.com.au). He first heard of our organisation through Central Coast Volunteering, beginning volunteer administration assistant work on a casual basis. Shane's commitment progressed as he took up a higher-level administration position through a Work for the Dole program before being offered full-time paid employment as an acknowledgement of his dedication and skills.

Shane's experience of Youth Connections is constantly varied. As the front of house face of the organisation, he is routinely managing multiple tasks across different departments, welcoming people to the site, completing filing, data entry, database maintenance and a range of other administration duties.

"Working for Youth Connections is like attending a fun and intensive administration school for me. I am constantly learning how to do new things and it offers the perfect training environment. I am surrounded by wonderful people that I am able to learn from and get to see all different elements of YC's work through my position."

Tech-savvy in his thinking, Shane has big plans for an office transformation where paper is made redundant, forms are digital and Youth Connections' learning enterprise distributes student work via online platforms like Moodle.

Shane has also been heavily involved in the coordination of one of our Abilities programs. 'Transcendence- Gaming at its Best!' is a monthly gaming hub where young people with and without a disability compete in friendly, inclusive Friday night gaming competitions. An avid gamer in his youth, Shane is keenly interested in assisting with the program and is learning skills in project management and disability support.

Youth Connections is incredibly proud of Shane's commitment and continual improvement in his role and we are extra grateful for his hard work and enthusiasm in all YC endeavours outside of administration.



## YC PROGRAM

Despite the cessation of Federal funding for the Youth Connections and Partnership Brokers Programs in 2014, we are immensely proud of how our staff and young people were impassioned advocates for these initiatives. The groundswell of community support for our work was truly humbling, with two wins remaining at the forefront of our minds.

Firstly, students Riley Giffen, Lionel Martin and Jack Coleman represented Youth Connections with dignity in the audience of ABC program Q&A. Through the work of YC staff and our amazing case managers, these young people were able to witness how civic engagement works in real-time.

Riley became a media sensation after speaking directly to the Federal Education Minister Christopher Pyne and speaking about what the Youth Connections program had done for him and many others. We were extremely honoured to have our young people speak with such pride and confidence and such an experience certainly shows the huge transformation our students made throughout their time in the program.

This success was closely followed with further community attention and interest in the stories of our three young advocates and the staff who worked so closely with them. Local filmmaker Kaye Robinson approached Youth Connections with the intention of making our organisation the basis of her documentary to be screened as part of the ABC's *Unsung Heroes* program. Kaye spoke with our young men and NGC Team Leader Linda Thomas, creating an exceptionally moving feature on our programs.

Another great opportunity for young people to engage in their communities and tell their stories with pride and candour. We thank all who showed support towards Riley, Jack, Lionel and all other Youth Connections participants at this time.





## NGC - JUSTIN

A keen footballer, automotive aficionado and Indigenous dancer-in-training, Justin Cashin is a young person going places. A naturally reserved young man, Justin found it hard to connect with other students and engage fully in a mainstream school environment. NG Central's dynamic combination of enterprise, kinaesthetic and vocational education speaks to students who might need additional support in the classroom, creative and varied teaching techniques or a fresh perspective on what it means to have skills and knowledge. Justin finds the small class sizes and hands-on activities make his studies relevant and more accessible.

"I've made good friends here and the teaching style suits me. Things are more flexible and we do lots of different stuff so the classes are more fun. Teachers talk to you one on one to help you understand."

NG Central believes in thinking outside the box when it comes to engaging young people in their education. Highly attuned to the multiple and often intersecting barriers that may make mainstream schooling difficult for some students, staff create an inclusive, supported and fun forum for learning that gives insight into the wider world of training, employment and community. With several case managers employed on-site to refer students to an extensive network of community services, health practitioners and counsellors, our young people are supported in navigating their education and adolescence. Justin benefits from this individualised case management.

Regular exposure to industry builds career aspirations among NG Central students. Those interested attend weekly automotive training at Youth Connections' The Skills Generator, a partner vocational enterprise that inspires and equips jobseekers for further training

and employment.

**"I WANT TO GET INTO MECHANICS AFTER SCHOOL, I REALLY LIKE CARS. I'M WORKING AT BMW IN KARIONG ON THE WEEKENDS, WHICH IS GOOD AUTOMOTIVE TRAINING AND GIVES ME SOME MONEY OF MY OWN."**

With an Indigenous student intake of approximately 30%, NG Central prioritises cultural affirmation as another tool to increase student well-being, engagement and confidence. Through his NG Central education, Justin was linked up with Aboriginal organisation and Youth Connection's partner Bara Barang Corporation Ltd. He was selected for a Fox Symes' education scholarship, which has fully equipped him for the classroom and provided access to a laptop, printer, mobile phone and many other resources.

Justin is also learning about his Indigenous culture through NG Central and Bara Barang's joint initiative Dance and Didge, a weekly workshop where Indigenous students craft and paint their own didgeridoos and learn the intricacies of Aboriginal dance. Justin has taken his talents public, performing at NAIDOC celebrations at Green Central alongside his Aboriginal mentors.

"I like learning the dancing, I'm getting more confident and I know a lot more about my culture now with Bruce and Athol teaching me."

Justin also regularly attends excursions to Camp QUOLL with Conservation and Land Management trainer Ian Sutton where students are encouraged to reconnect with nature in a sustainable way. "I don't think I could live out there though- no tv and no wifi would be pretty hard."

In a region as expansive as the Central Coast, a car and the ability to drive safely and confidently is an essential asset for youth applying for jobs, receiving education and training and working particularly in the vocational sector. Geographic, social and financial isolation can make the feat of recording 120 hours of supervised driving seem insurmountable. But this is a non-negotiable challenge in achieving a probationary licence.

Over the last two years, Youth Connections' Youth Reference Group sought to solve this region-specific problem through the implementation of yDrive - a learner driver mentor program. It matches disadvantaged young people with volunteer mentor drivers from the wider community; a partnership which benefits both parties through the sharing of skills, knowledge and inter-generational life experience.

yDrive received 191 expressions of interest in the program. From this 83 participants were engaged with 34 successfully obtaining their P1 licence. 15 young parents were supported in the program and 8 successfully gained their P1 licence. An incredible outcome and an accomplishment that can benefit them professionally and personally.

A great example is young mum Ashlee Fraser. Ashlee is a participant of the Better Futures Hub in Wyong. The initiative assists young parents and long-term unemployed in the Wyong Shire and was brokered by YC and key partners across education, training, health and community services. Ashlee currently attends the Young Parents Program where she is completing a HSC pathway.

Before achieving her licence, Ashlee faced a mammoth commute to school and childcare on a daily basis, often catching four buses a day. This was a huge strain physically and mentally, and was compounded with the responsibility of motherhood. To fulfil the necessary hours, Ashlee needed some extra support and consistent, reliable access to a vehicle and supervising driver. She worked with Ron and the yDrive program for four months.

**“RON WAS SO SUPPORTIVE, HE JUST MADE EVERYTHING FEEL EASIER AND ACHIEVABLE. AND HE WAS SO FUNNY TOO, WHICH KEPT ME CALM AND STOPPED MY NERVES GETTING AHEAD OF ME.”**

Ashlee was successful in achieving her probationary licence and life is looking completely different. No longer spending several hours commuting, she finds that her ability to drive has given her independence and freedom.

“I feel I have more time to focus on my studies and look after my beautiful daughter. She's my priority, and knowing I can take her anywhere we need to go is a relief”.

Similarly satisfied participants abound amongst our NG Central students. Hunter is a Year 10 student who had barely scraped the surface of his hours when Ron took

him on. Hunter is quick to praise Ron for his responsive and encouraging attitude to teaching.

“If I say I need to practice hill-starts, or gear changes, or whatever it is, Ron always makes sure we get straight into it. I feel like I'm actually improving.”

With over 40 hours under his belt, Hunter is well on his way to a successful outcome. Hayden, a Year 10 student says that yDrive is a good solution for young people like himself who can't regularly access a learner vehicle.

“It's made it more convenient and it's good learning from someone who really knows. I've even mastered reverse parking.”

For young people like Hunter and Ashlee, their licence is a ticket to a changed life trajectory, boasting ease, convenience, opportunity and potential employment.



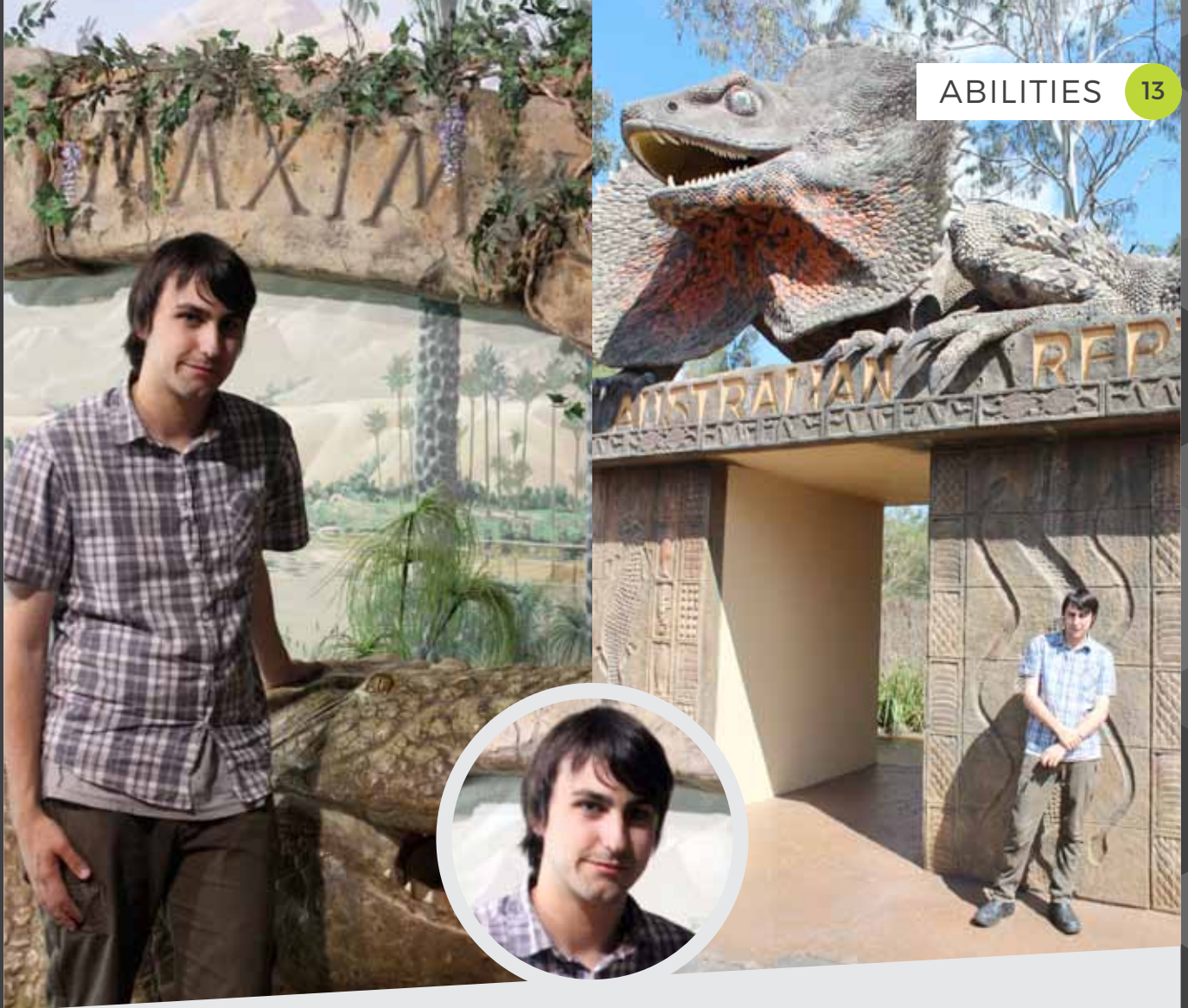
Building on the success of yDrive, the Youth Reference Group utilised their new expertise and project management skills in a collaboration with Aboriginal organisation Yawuru.

Despite being thousands of kilometres away in Western Australia, Youth Connections and Yawuru joined forces to talk yDrive successes and how these could be replicated across the country.

We shared our outcomes and barriers to Yawuru staff who are interested in developing a similar program in the Kimberly for their young people. We also discussed the possibility of our partner Bara Barang Aboriginal Corporation Pty Ltd and their Youth Reference Group joining forces with the young people at Yawuru to share ideas and begin a partnership.

It was a fantastic opportunity to share knowledge and experiences with another organisation doing meaningful work with young people and to show them a way to further alleviate barriers which prevent youth from fully engaging in their community. May there be many more collaborations to come!





## TTW - AARON

Aaron Adams is no average 19-year-old, rivalling Doctor Doolittle as an expert animal whisperer. He's always loved animals and has wanted to work with them his whole life. So when coordinating his work experience placement through the Transition to Work (TTW) program, The Australian Reptile Park was an obvious choice.

Aaron has previously done multiple work experience placements, including a stint at Fahrenheit Cafe in Gosford and describes work experience as a good way for employers to get to know him and to improve his chances of finding work. But all other placements have paled in comparison to his time handling reptiles.

"I always thought working with animals would be interesting, but this has honestly been one of the best experiences of my life. I'm so grateful to Catherine for organising something which fits my interests so well, because now I know for sure that working with animals is exactly what I want to do."

Aaron has been given an insider insight into animal care; cleaning out cages, feeding mammals and birds, cleaning out enclosures, helping in the show

pit with photos and throwing caution to the wind nursing a python! A highlight was cuddling up to baby dingo pups, birthed at the park only three months prior.

Aaron has shown massive commitment and personal responsibility as he navigates his work experience, putting in long days of work, organising his transport to and from the park and pitching in wherever needed. His supervisors have given extensive positive feedback and Aaron hopes to apply for a volunteer position with the park.

"They've trusted me to be independent and give everything a go- and 98% of the time, their feedback has been 'Spot on!'. It's an awesome feeling to do a good job and see how everything works behind the scenes. It's so much cooler than even being a visitor. I just wish it didn't have to end."

Aaron now hopes to pursue a Certificate III in Captive Animals, which will equip him for employment at The Reptile Park or a similar site. TTW will continue to assist him in these employment and training goals, alongside further work experience next year.





## TTW - MEL

Mel Smith is a lady of many talents; an animal advocate, a work experience aficionado and an expert receptionist at Youth Connections' HQ Green Central. Mel has been a Transition to Work (TTW) participant since 2013, taking part in multiple work experience placements, achieving qualifications and learning new employment-based skills.

Mel is a keen animal-lover, with an ever-escalating number of pets at home. TTW organised work experience placements with the RSPCA and The Australian Reptile Park, where she was able to handle animals and assist with maintenance duties 'behind the scenes'. She then took this to the next level, recently hosting her own RSPCA fundraiser at Green Central with a very successful cupcake sale.

"I got to come up with the idea from scratch and I felt really good about fundraising for the RSPCA because I know they do important work saving lives and rescuing neglected animals."

TTW has also assisted Mel in achieving her Certificate II in Skills for Work and Training and she is currently

progressing through her Certificate I in Work Education. She is also achieving her Certificate III in Business Admin, previously working in reception at Fairhaven Tuggerah and now at Green Central once a week.

Mel has built confidence through Youth Connections reception duties, working independently and reliably at multiple tasks for different departments. Her supervisor Nareeda acknowledges her work ethic as a key factor in her success and her friendly personality and quick sense of humour is a welcome addition to our site.

"I like to hang out with the Abilities after-school care program when I'm onsite and help the support workers. I also go on plenty of excursions with the NG Central students- a highlight was definitely going to Wet 'n' Wild".

TTW also offers Mel regular community engagement activities and excursions, gym visits and weekly cooking classes where participants learn life-skills and healthy eating habits. We love seeing Mel grow her skills and having her cheeky smile around our site.





### TTW - JAMES

James was one of our fantastic Transition to Work (TTW) participants throughout 2013-2014. A sweet, friendly young man with tremendous work ethic, we knew it wouldn't be long until James was ready for the workforce.

After significant transition-planning, goal-setting and discussions with his support workers around his interests and abilities, he was supported to commence a work experience placement at Narara Valley Nursery several months after he started the program. This continued for three months, before he was offered a two day paid position. The achievement was a real credit to James and the job-readiness, work experience and job-searching skills he learnt in TTW. James displayed such dedication and conscientious effort in his position that he was promoted to four days a week and has now secured a full-time position in 2015.

His supervisor Suzanne Leece notes that he continually maintains professionalism and is always ready to go the extra mile to help out.

**"I'VE BEEN WORKING HERE 20 YEARS, AND HE IS THE BEST WORKER I'VE EVER HAD WITH ME".**

James is quick to praise his employer, excitedly talking about the range of tasks he completes on a daily basis; everything from watering, pricing and potting plants to customer service. When asked how TTW supported him throughout his work experience and through his employment, he suggests that it provided him with a lot of helpful advice and information on navigating the workforce including self-presentation and "dressing for success", interview techniques, work-experience at Green Central and job-searching strategies.

"It's really friendly and supportive and everyone I met in the program was great, especially my support worker Catherine".





## TRANSITION SUPPORT PROGRAM

Our Transition Support Program (TSP) students undertook a hugely rewarding project across 2014 in partnership with aged care facility Scenic Lodge in Merewether. Students from Newcastle High School from Years 9, 10, 11 and 12 committed to a weekly meet-up with residents of the facility, where they improved their communication abilities, practised empathy and active listening and showed companionship and camaraderie to the elderly.

The program began with students getting to know the residents in a mutually respectful environment. They utilised social skills and formed positive relationships through engaging in the every-day activities of the facility, such as playing Bingo and Monopoly and having conversations with residents about their families, routines and favourite hobbies.

TSP Support Worker Kim Moore noted that these interactions were all about mutually beneficial exchange, with students practising life skills and residents reaping joy from these conversations, with many of them having prior experience in teaching, medicine and nursing.

“A love of food slowly became central to many of the conversations participants and residents were having and we realised that there was a great opportunity to collaborate and create something special. We decided

to create a recipe book, with students scribing favourite recipes of the residents; an awesome collation of family history and food.” Kim said.

**WHOLE FAMILIES BECAME INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS, AS STUDENTS UTILISED A VARIETY OF SKILLS TO DISTILL ALL THEIR DISCUSSIONS INTO A FANTASTIC RECIPE BOOK.**

The TSP then took the project to the next level and sold the book in the lead-up to Mothers Day 2015, managing stalls at Market Town Newcastle and the Scenic Lodge Annual Fete. Not only did this allow students to practice money management, it raised valuable funds for our program.

The Scenic Lodge collaboration didn't stop there, with students also taking part in a horticulture and gardening project with active residents. In keeping with the theme of food, everyone planted and tended to fresh produce, herbs and spices that could be used in cooking at the facility. With many older men teaching participants the basics of landscaping, sustainable horticulture, weeding and harvesting, TSP was soon responsible for a thriving produce garden at Scenic Lodge.

Now that was a delicious outcome for everyone!



## TRANSCENDENCE

'Transcendence- Gaming at its Best' was a new edition to our Youth Connections Abilities program in 2015, to great success. Welcoming young people with and without a disability, the Hub became a hotspot of fierce competition, computer whizzes and gaming aficionados. The establishment of friendly, social Friday night gaming competitions saw young people simultaneously test their skills, have fun and make friends.

Transcendence Coordinator Reagan Campbell believes that the act of gaming offers far more than meets the eye.

"The games we select for our participants prioritise problem-solving and strategy, meaning they're exercising their minds in the process. Transcendence is so powerful because it provides motivation for these young people to get out of their rooms, socialise with each other and form real-life friendships. It's not about personal glory or competition, it's about teamwork and showing good sportsmanship."

Mixing both young people with and without a disability across two gaming groups (9-15 & 16-21 years old) has allowed everyone to engage without labels

or restrictions and has encouraged camaraderie between participants who may not otherwise come into contact.

Shane Lennard is not only our Youth Connections administrator, but boasts the dual titles of Transcendence right hand man and avid gamer. He emphasises how Transcendence removes the occasionally escapist notions of gaming.

"What Transcendence does is bring them all together and allow them to socialise, make new friends and enjoy gaming in an environment that is inclusive and engaging, not isolated. The best words I have ever heard said at Transcendence were between two young people making friends saying "Hey, you should come round this weekend."

Shane hopes to acquire some retro gaming consoles like Nintendo 64 for the young participants to enjoy and looks forward to watching them have fun playing games that were so influential in his adolescence. This is certainly just the beginning for Transcendence- watch this space!





### T-TEAM - KOSTA

Kosta Bacopo is a familiar and friendly face around Youth Connections through his long-time involvement in the T-Team Abilities program. Having just graduated from Narara Valley High School, Kosta is ready to use all the skills he's been honing since he began in 2012.

Whilst Kosta has spent several years with T-Team fiercely competing in games and scavenger hunts, heading up team-building activities and embarking on plenty of outdoor excursions and camps, as he's grown older it's the social aspect he enjoys most.

"I've come to know so many people here, so it's always a great chance to chill out with friends and see everyone. It's always been a place where you can meet new people."

Now finished school, Kosta will be transferring to our complementary Abilities program Transition to Work (TTW) which engages school leavers with a disability. Kosta will work with qualified support staff to devise a customised program of activities to improve his employability, communication, travel, time-management and life skills and build aspirations for the future.

Kosta has multiple options he could follow, having already had TVET experience in Commercial Cookery and Auto Car Detailing and a keen eye for computing and IT. But Kosta has a career pathway already in mind.

"My number one passion is working with cars, it's something I've always wanted to do and been interested in. If I don't get work in that after school, I'd also think about joining the army."

Kosta is always warm, friendly and quick to laugh and we'll miss his sense of humour at T-Team. But we look forward to seeing the directions he takes with the Transition to Work program and the fulfilling future ahead of him.



### T-TEAM - WANDA

You can always count on Wanda Rassmussen to embrace any new adventures taking place around Youth Connections. In her second year in the T-Team Abilities program and Year 8 at Henry Kendall High School, the 14-year-old is independent, inquisitive and has imagination in spades.

T-Team is an Abilities program of [youthconnections.com.au](http://youthconnections.com.au), which offers after-school and vacation care to young people with a disability. It runs out of Green Central Kariong and Gravity Youth Centre Lakehaven and participants are constantly engaged in diverse, age-appropriate activities, which encourage active socialisation, team-building, communication and confidence.

Wanda has autism, with delay receptive and expressive language and regularly attends after-school care. Like many others, Wanda has responded extremely well to our suite of diverse, age-appropriate activities, which encourage active socialisation, team-building, communication and confidence.

Wanda has thrown herself into activities like bush-walks, crafts, picnics and visits to the local swimming pool. Vacation Care has seen her exploring the outdoors, enjoying the IMAX cinema and Hunter Valley Zoo and most recently reaching new heights riding cable-cars in the Blue Mountains on the annual Abilities camp.

Wanda is a lady of many talents, with nimble crafting skills, a love of Mathematics and many years' experience as a Contemporary and Modern Dancer. T-Team support workers are young, experienced and attuned to participants' needs and interests to provide them with relevant life-skills training, goal-setting and mentorship. The program also ensures parents can access respite, counselling, referral services, and funding and advocacy support.

Support Worker Elodie acknowledges that Wanda needs imaginary time on a daily basis and enjoys playing by her-self, but she has also made efforts to extend Wanda's social skills. And it's been working.

**"I HAVE MADE A LOT OF FRIENDS: PEOPLE ARE REALLY NICE. I LIKE IT BEST WHEN WE GO OUT EXPLORING AND GO TO NEW PLACES, BECAUSE I LIKE GOING FOR WALKS. WHEN I GROW UP, I'D LOVE TO TRAVEL TO MANY PLACES."** WANDA SAID.

Wanda is a delight to be around and we look forward to having her charming presence around-site for years to come.





## YOUTH SUPPORT PLANNING - TEAGAN

When you meet Teagan, the first thing you notice is her mischievous smile. Living on a rural property with her parents and siblings, the 17-year-old has a boundless sense of adventure and a keen love for animals and the great outdoors. And she's also got a talent for organisation most adults would dream of and can work to a routine with razor precision. Basically, Teagan is a force to be reckoned with!

A recent graduate from Casino High School, Teagan is living with cerebral palsy, autism and developmental delay. School wasn't easy, as she has experienced a lot of frustration as she grappled with literacy and writing. After learning in her school's support unit, Teagan and her parents were told that she wouldn't be able to find work. But with some sought after support, Teagan's life trajectory has totally changed.

She was referred to Youth Connections by Aging Disability and Home Care (ADHC) in October 2014 and through the Youth Support Planning program, Teagan and her family have been assisted in identifying Teagan's goals personally and professionally. As a result, Teagan currently works for Luisa's Fine Food in a supported employment position two days a week. She also attends a day program for the remaining three days.

Through collaborating with the program service provider, we were able to negotiate one day per week tailored to meet Teagan's unique needs, in a significantly reduced client to worker environment. Teagan is also developing a passion for dance and is planning on joining mainstream Zumba classes on a regular basis, as part of her recently secured Recreation Package.

What's on the horizon for Teagan now? Her dream is to live independently, in a space she can call her own while still accessing appropriate supports. We'll be keeping tabs on this young lady. No one will stand in the way of her and her goals!





In 2015, our group training organisation YC Industry Link Pty Ltd experienced an exciting evolution, rebranding as Trade Staff Australia. Same high-quality service, same strong partnerships- with a new aesthetic to match our recent growth.

Trade Staff Australia is proud to offer best-practice group training services that are responsive, effective and authentic.

As a specialist Building and Construction recruiter and employer, with the highest number of bricklaying apprentices in NSW, Trade Staff Australia connects quality apprentices and employers across the country.

A partnered approach is key to success, allowing us to provide wrap-around support and services for all customers. Trade Staff Australia is proud to work with:

- Masonry Contractors Australia (MCA)
- Australian Brick and Block-Laying Training Foundation (ABBTF)
- Sarina Russo Apprenticeships
- Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT)
- TAFE NSW
- Construction Industry Training Council (CITC)
- The Skills Generator (TSG)
- Training Fund Authority (TFA)
- JobActive Providers (Job Links Plus, MAX Employment, Salvation Army Employment Plus)



## WORK FOR THE DOLE - CONSTRUCTION

In a world where 'up-cycling' is a buzzword and 'hipster' is an aesthetic, The Skills Generator (TSG) led the charge with our Construction Work For The Dole project. Working out of TSG HQ in West Gosford, Mal Smith headed up multiple DIY construction projects that have Fantastic Furniture functionality AND sustainability as a selling point.

The participating job-seekers had varying levels of construction experience, most being new to the trade but eagerly picking up skills under Mal's expert instruction. The final haul of furniture stands at multiple tables, cutting edge standing desks, coffee tables, shelves, vanity cabinets, picnic tables, park-seats and photo-frames. Many have been proudly claimed by TSG staff, transforming the premises into a haven that would look at home in the Inner West of Sydney, more so than West Gosford.

**'THEY'RE ABSOLUTELY MARKETABLE, I'VE BEEN REALLY PROUD OF THE QUALITY OF THEIR WORK AND WE'VE KNOCKED UP SOME AWESOME PRODUCTS FROM RECYCLED TIMBER.' MAL NOTES.**

Their major project for the six-month Work For the Dole program was the creation and distribution of 26 vertical

gardens for 26 lucky Not For Profit organisations. The structures are an urbanite's dream, made from up-cycled timber pallets sourced from the local industrial zone and donated by neighbouring companies such as Masters, Bunnings and Central Coast Bricks. The 'green walls' can be customised in size, lacquer finishes and plant selection, making them a welcome addition to any space.

After finishing up employment in foundation testing, participant Sean has taken to the new trade well and enjoyed the group dynamic of the project. 'It's been great learning how to put together the gardens, we're changing the world one pallet at a time'.

Liane has a background in environmental monitoring and technology, but has similarly taken to Construction and created some beautiful timber pieces, including a quirky coffee table made from an old-fashioned sanded school desk.

TSG National Development Manager Marcus Watson now has his eye on it and jokes that the hipster aesthetic of their furniture would easily sell in alternative coastal havens like Long Jetty.

'Somebody needs to let The Glass Onion know about this thriving trade we're doing here, they're one-of-a-kind retro remakes'.





## WORK FOR THE DOLE - AUTO

Engines have been running at full steam down at The Skills Generator with our Automotive Work For the Dole project. Delivered in collaboration with Hoken Automotive and MAX Employment, the six-month project taught job-seekers valuable vocational skills in automotive maintenance and repair.

Hoken Automotive employee Sam Colebrook led the project, instructing the crew in the basics of automotive and working with tools before plunging them into a crash course in servicing, maintenance, diagnostics and basic electrical work in a fully equipped automotive workshop.

In learning how to teach the young men and to transfer his extensive experience into quality training for others, Sam has expanded his own skill-set.

"It was a challenge at first, but it's great to work with the guys and see them picking things up. Plus as a trainer, my hands are a lot cleaner than in my old job", Sam jokes.

The Auto project saw the group routinely servicing and revamping donor cars that are then delivered to apprentices, as much needed transport for their training. The Skills Generator gives Work For The Dole participants the opportunity to work on their own cars, with the provision that they cover only the cost of the parts. This is a great opportunity for young job-seekers to not only practice their skills in real-life situations, but to equip themselves with an essential advantage in the trade sector; a fully functional vehicle.

The big-ticket item for the Auto crew is definitely the revitalisation of a donated Troop Carrier. The project

involves rebuilding the interior of the truck and a full paint and panel redo. Sam notes that the team will spend several months learning panel-beating skills, to strip, paint and 'beef up' the tired Troopy.

25-year-old participant Geoff Warner is a young parent who has greatly improved his employability throughout the project. Through the program, The Skills Generator (TSG) helped Geoff secure an interview with a potential employer. When trial employment was offered to him on the provision that he gain his probationary licence, TSG brokered a partnership with yDrive, Youthconnections.com.au's learner mentor driver program on Geoff's behalf. This meant he was able to access a qualified driving instructor and receive lessons which led to the achievement of his licence.

"Having a licence is so important when you're job-seeking; especially when you want to work in a trade. It gives you more independence and makes you feel more in control. It also makes a big difference to how I can take care of my daughter."

Geoff can now service his own car and perform general maintenance duties.

**"IT'S PRETTY SWEET GETTING TO WORK ON CARS ALL DAY, ALL THE FELLAS ARE GOOD GUYS AND I'M KEEN TO SEE THE TROOPY COME TOGETHER. IT'S LOOKING GREAT."**

A big acknowledgment goes to Hoken Automotive and Sam Colebrook, for their continued support of TSG and the Work For the Dole program.



## TSA - AROP

For young people wanting to enter the brick-laying trade, the transition can be as tough as the work itself. It takes grit and determination to make it through an apprenticeship; the early starts, the grunt work, the constant wear on your body. But with the support and expertise of a group training organisation to guide you through your training trajectory, apprentices are 20% more likely to attain their qualification.

22-year-old Trade Staff Australia (TSA) apprentice Arop Akok Deng Chom is the perfect example of a young person benefiting from such support. Being Australia's first south Sudanese man to successfully attain his bricklaying qualification, he is quick to attest to Australia as fertile ground for opportunity and a viable career in the trade sector. Arop is the kind of advocate that any industry dreams of: a poster-boy for loving your work and a big believer taking advice from the right people, keeping your head down and focusing on your goals with razor precision.

Arop was widely recognised when he was nominated for the Western Sydney division of the Australian Apprentice of the Year Awards. He walked away with the Phil Darby Memorial Award of Excellence; a high commendation of his education to the trade.

He says that his brick-laying apprenticeship has not only taught him the raw skills essential on a job-site, but has changed his mind-set and toughened him from, in his own words, 'the little boy to the big, strong man' he is today.

Arop has already been rendered tougher to life's adversities than most. A Sudanese refugee, Arop fled Sudan with only his uncle at a very young age, war torn circumstance separating him from the rest of his family. However, to hear him speak about his gratitude and purpose, you'd never suspect the turmoil of his past. Arop is so committed to a bright, purposeful future, to working hard at his trade and to living by his old school motto - be the best man you can be. But this future won't be crafted from luck and fortune, as Arop swears by seizing opportunity and delivering tenacity back in spades.

When asked how to make it through an apprenticeship, Arop is adamant in taking advantage of the opportunities offered to him in Australia.

"If you put your head down and listen to the right people, you can achieve a lot. You need to work hard and stay tough, even when you feel like falling off the wagon".

To borrow Arop's terms, 'Falling off the wagon' is not an uncommon occurrence for fresh-faced brickies. Apprentice life can be challenging and without substantial support, it can seem an insurmountable feat. This is where Group Training Organisations like Trade Staff Australia jump into action. These organisations offer intensive support to apprentices and, training and contracting them out to local employers. The work of the fieldworker doesn't stop there, they also regularly visit apprentices and ensure they are keeping their eyes on the prize. Group training organisations also provide a cost-efficient and administratively simple way for businesses to hire apprentices/trainees when this might otherwise not be possible

Arop says he has his field worker Nick Humphreys to thank for his success.

"Nick is one of the best people I've met here in Australia. He's been there through the ups and downs of my apprenticeship and helped me out a lot. I couldn't have done it by myself. I hope Trade Staff Australia continues to do this for other young people."

When asked what advice Arop would give to an aspiring bricklayer, he says,

**"THERE'S NO POINT IN DOING SOMETHING IF YOU DON'T LOVE IT. TO ALL OTHER ASPIRING BRICKIES OUT THERE, DON'T LET ANYTHING PUT YOU OFF. IF YOU BELIEVE IN YOURSELF, THEN NO ONE CAN TAKE THAT AWAY FROM YOU".**

Words to live by, regardless of your trade by day.





## TSA - DYLAN

When it comes to creating a purposeful future, successes don't come much better than Trade Staff Australia apprentice Dylan Cambrey-Fairbridge. His trajectory into the workforce shows how leveraging support around training, education and employment can open up new opportunities.

He enrolled as a Year 11 student at NG Central and took to the alternative learning environment well. Exhibiting a natural aptitude when it came to all things trade, he particularly enjoyed vocational training and education; a key component of the NG Central curriculum.

Through his weekly trade tasters in Fabrication and Carpentry, Dylan was connected with The Skills Generator and was drawn to the hands-on, earn and learn model that defines apprenticeship and traineeship career pathways. Staff referred him to a neighbouring boiler making business Central Coast Fencing Industries and assisted him in applying for a first-year apprentice position.

"I'd had some work experience in engineering and fabrication and my pop and granddad were in the boiler-making industry, so it was always something that made sense to me. After doing an extended work trial with CCFI, I landed the apprenticeship."

Dylan's been lucky to have a great boss and older work-mates who have helped him transition into the life of a tradesman. Quality host employers who invest in the skill-set and wellbeing of their apprentices are an absolute asset for young, aspiring apprentices who need intensive support as they're starting out.

"My work-mates support me really well, they're funny and they have your back. And the guys at Trade Staff Australia look out for me. Kaitlin always makes sure my pays are done on time and I have people there to explain things to me."

Dylan thinks a career in boiler-making is definitely on the cards, continuing a proud family tradition.

"There are definitely rough moments- the 5.15am wake-up for one, but it's great to be able to earn some money while I get some experience."



## ORGANISE INTERNET

Organise Internet is a web development company that has been a partner in Structured Workplace Learning for the long haul, taking placements for over six years. This year that commitment reached new heights, through the formation of an alliance between Youth Connections, Lisarow High School's Advanced IT class and Organise Internet. On a regular basis, Dave and Les took on pairs of students for a week of structured, engaged workplace learning in their Gosford-based media hub and IT studio.

Dave is adamant that work placements are a worthy investment for student and employer.

"We want students to get a genuine experience where they see how a business works in real-time and are effectively mentored and granted responsibility to make creative decisions. To do that, we need to put time and energy into each placement, but we are always rewarded for that effort through the student's engagement."

Over the course of 2015, they offered over 30 young people a vibrant and hands-on insight into the IT industry; a worthy contribution to youth education and employment outcomes.

Organise Internet worked closely with their client Ducks Crossing Publications, facilitating an opportunity for students to contribute to the editing of an online newspaper and practise skills in image and video editing. This was in conjunction with side-projects in animation, video production, web programming and photo editing, tailored to the individual student's interests, talent and experience.

By brokering a partnership where Lisarow High School students worked directly with the one employer and placements were consistently coordinated around Organise Internet's schedule and workload, we could ensure a high-quality, immersive experience that was mutually beneficial for both parties. This exemplifies the cross-sector collaboration that sets our SWL delivery apart from others, as we procure partnerships to ensure best-practice outcomes for young people.

Lisarow High School student Nadia Martucci, is testament to the success of this innovative model and to the calibre of both employer and student that Youth Connections works with. Through her impressive work-placement, she was offered part-time work with Organise Internet and now provides valuable assistance with the production, formatting and tagging of the online version of Ducks Crossing's publications.

"They offered a realistic experience of what work is like in the adult world and I was treated like an adult rather than a student. I would love to pursue a career in IT, or business operations. This has inspired me to own my own business in the future." Nadia said.

### MR ABRAHAMS BELIEVES THAT WITH A LITTLE PREPARATION, STUDENT WORK PLACEMENTS CAN ENERGISE A BUSINESS.

"If you approach it in a structured way, you can achieve fantastic outcomes for the student and your enterprise. With the right resource allocation, you can get more work done, know you've done a great service to the community and maybe even find a new employee."





### YC MEDIA- KEISHA

Kiesha Bovill is a woman to watch. A Year 11 Indigenous student from St Peter's Catholic College, she'd always had her eye on the entertainment industry, but had little idea where to start. Her Entertainment and Media work placement at YC Media put her on the pathway to a stellar acting career, by showing her the breadth of the industry.

"During that week, my eyes really opened. Getting that glimpse into a real media workplace made me really excited for the future, knowing how many opportunities it has to offer".

Kiesha produced a one-hour radio show for YC Media, as part of our collaboration with Coast FM Radio. Students are mentored as they learn the fundamentals of radio editing, as well as what it takes to curate and present engaging content. Kiesha took her work placement to the next level, as she directed, produced, edited and acted in her own short film on teen stress and its ramifications.

YC Media Coordinator Nicole Yardley encouraged her to upload it to YouTube, where it received a great response, and assisted Kiesha in creating her own StarNow profile to attract future acting jobs. Nicole worked overtime after the placement was over, securing Kiesha and her classmates as paid extras for the ABC TV show 'Get Ready For This'. Kiesha describes it as a fulfilling experience that allowed her to meet some amazing people.

"The insight YC Media gave me into the entertainment industry was invaluable; I'm now taking concrete steps towards my career".

The most exciting step Kiesha has taken is applying for a scholarship with The Actors Pulse, a prestigious acting academy in Redfern. Out of 50 applicants, Kiesha was one of only four finalists, granting her a partial scholarship. She has now been attending The Actors Pulse for over a month and absolutely loves it. We're expecting incredible things from Kiesha, watch this space!







## THE VOICE

YC Media was excited to say the least when our alumni participants hit the big time on hit television show The Voice!

Both Nathan Hawes and Jake Howden were former YC Media work-placement successes, with their musical talent ringing loud and clear on our student-produced CD in 2014. Both entertainment aficionados were successful in auditioning for the program and showcased their talent to the nation on live television!

What a claim to fame! We only wish we had grabbed their autographs before they hit the big-time. Congratulations to these very talented young men living their passion for music.





## **TRY-A-SKILL**

Try 'a' Skill is an annual expo held at Ourimbah TAFE, where Year 9 and 10 students visit in droves to learn about vocational training and education and the opportunities it offers.

Youth Connections is a familiar face amongst Registered Training Organisations, educational institutions and employers present at the event. This year, YC Media played a key role in the proceedings.

Our St Peter's Catholic College work-placement students assisted in photographing the expo on Ourimbah TAFE's behalf, while also coordinating a mini 'media and entertainment' taster activity for interested students to test-drive.

With the support of YC Media coordinator Nicole, the students involved on-lookers in a crash course in video production, from controlling ambient sound and operating the cameras to scripting and interview technique. Youth Connections' own NG Central students were keenly interested in getting in front of the cameras, producing their own advertisements and working their best angles.

Even Wyong MP Mr David Harris and Wyong Councillor Bob Graham took turns as interviewees, chatting with our work-placement students about the value of vocational training.

Not only was the day a chance to showcase Youth Connections and YC Media as a quality provider of structured work-placement, it gave our students a chance to try out their newly acquired skills in project management, film production and photography. We can't wait to up the ante next expo!

## **CROWDFUNDING**

The Structured Workplace Learning Program had another success through YC Media and some very talented Year 11 students from Northlakes High School. In a prime example of Youth Connections collaboration, these work-placement students were engaged in a project of All Things Finance. All Things Finance is Youth Connections' newly established social enterprise which offers comprehensive accounting, book-keeping and taxation services to the local community.

All Things Finance was on the cusp of executing their ING Direct Dreamstarter crowdfunding campaign, with the ambitious goal of establishing a co-located business college for students interested in forging a career in the financial sector. To ensure the campaign had as much online impact as possible, YC Media work-placement students assisted in the filming, scripting and editing of a promotional video. This film showcased the innovative concept of All Things Finance to great effect and we were blown away with the professionalism and positive attitude of every student involved. A big thank you to Northlakes High School, our crowdfunding campaign could not have been successful without you!

## BFH - WORK FOR THE DOLE - MEDIA

The Better Futures Hub strives to support people to contribute to their communities, through civic engagement, socialisation and economic participation. With this mission in mind, Youth Connections, the Better Futures Hub and job-active Salvation Army Employment Plus partnered on a highly successful Media, Marketing and Promotions Work for the Dole project, to assist jobseekers in improving their work-readiness.

Ten participants worked together to strategise and implement media, marketing and promotions activities

for the Hub, building abilities in administration, social media, event planning, media liaison, research, database management, team-work and communication.

For aspiring computer whiz Chris, this project allowed him to hone technical skills he had previously learnt through his volunteer video editing with Hope UC Church. He found the hands-on nature of the activities to be a great strength of the program and could see the real-life application of the projects they worked on.

"It's great not just being in the depths of a backroom doing stock-take- I'm using my skills with an important end goal in mind".



## BFH - YOUNG PARENTS PROGRAM

Lucy Hinder-Smith is the definition of a super-mum! A former participant of the DALE Young Parents Program at the Better Futures Hub, she has worked extremely hard and leveraged the support networks around her to achieve success.

Lucy fell pregnant to her twins Alexis and Molly when she was 16 and left high school in Year 10. In 2013, she decided to resume her education through the Young Parents Program at Wadalba Community School, before being relocated to the Better Futures Hub in 2014. Lucy was committed to being the best student she could be and benefitted enormously from the flexible and supportive learning environment of the alternative school and wrap-around BFH services.

The on-site creche initially assisted in the twins' childcare before the BFH supported Lucy in enrolling them in Wyong Family Day Care. Lucy was also involved in resilient parenting workshops through the BFH's delivery of the ACORN program.

"The Hub, the staff, the participants, everyone at the Hub

tries their best to help out when needed. The Hub has great facilities such as the computer lab where you can go to study and complete course work. It's very close to public transport, which is so important when you have small children and I think it makes a big difference having all these services under the one roof."

Lucy completed her Year 12 pathway, achieving great marks and describing it as a 'fantastic learning environment'. She then enrolled in a Certificate III in Business with ET Australia, an on-site registered training organisation and partner in the Better Futures Hub consortium. By the last week of the course, Lucy interviewed for a 2 year traineeship with Wyong Golf Club.

"The interview was very nerve-wracking, but I ended up getting the job! I couldn't believe it, it was a really happy day for me. I am now 1 year in to the 2 year traineeship and when I am finished I will have a Certificate IV in Business Administration. I am extremely proud of all my achievements".

Lucy emphasises how fortunate she has been to have the support of her fiancé Daniel, her parents and in-laws, particularly when it comes to helping out with the kids.



As a mother of two, Kelly had a similarly positive experience of utilising and improving her existing skills in a project-based activity. Having finished her Business Administration diploma, Kelly was about to put her professional skills into practice, even assisting some of the younger participants.

Kelly saw the Work for the Dole activity as a chance to diversify her skill-set and add to her resume to ensure higher likelihood of gaining employment.

"Having kids means that you're slightly constrained in the employment opportunities you can realistically seek. You make sacrifices and you stay conscious of what's going to

be best for your kids and your quality of life. That's why a 9-5 job during the week is what I'm seeking'

And that was exactly what she attained through her efforts, being offered employment with Youth Connections' affiliated social enterprise accounting firm All Things Finance. From there, Kelly has progressed to now coordinate a Youth Connections Work for the Dole activity of her own!

Similarly, Chris's experience of the project increased his motivation to pursue meaningful work. He notes that the Better Futures Hub is a great establishment to work with and that their work with young mums and dads really resonates with his family.

"It's important to me that I work to support my little boy, and my partner, so I come here every week and get closer to that job opportunity".

Excellent outcomes abounded with five participants gaining employment by the end of the project. The innovative implementation of Work for the Dole principles attracted the attention of local Federal Member Karen McNamara MP who invited the Minister for Employment, Sen Eric Abetz and Deputy Minister, Luke Hartsukyer for separate visits to talk with the participants and hear the project results. Sen Eric Abetz wrote a thank you letter to the group and a personal letter for one participant congratulating them on their participation and commitment to gaining employment.

She also recommends the Better Futures Hub to young parents in similar situations.

"The BFH is family. It is extremely special to me and something that is really close to my heart. I will never forget that being a part of the BFH has given me the opportunities that have gotten me to where I am today."

When asked what's next for her, Lucy has one ambition that motivates her above all others.

**"I WANT TO BE THE BEST MOTHER I CAN POSSIBLY BE TO MY TWO BEAUTIFUL GIRLS ALEXIS AND MOLLY, BECAUSE AT THE END OF THE DAY THEY ARE THE REASON I TRY MY BEST AND WORK SO HARD".**

Congratulations Lucy on your incredible achievements, fantastic attitude and commitment to being the best mother, student and employee you can be.



## **BFH - POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT**

The Better Futures Hub attracted significant political attention over the past year and received praise for its innovative collective impact model. Wyong MP Ms Karen McNamara has been a champion of the project, ensuring the Federal government are aware of the services and achievements of our community. She has taken a keen interest in the well-being of our young parents, attending 2 luncheons at the Hub alongside students.

In turn, our parents experienced political and civic engagement first hand, attaining a childcare and youth forum with Senator Scott Morrison to discuss the needs, barriers and aspirations of young parents and jobless families in the Wyong Shire and meeting then-Prime Minister Tony Abbott. Better Futures Hub participants were passionate and articulate advocates for their peers and the programs which have seen them succeed.

Our Media, Marketing and Promotions Work for the Dole project was similarly well regarded by local and Federal politicians. The team of jobseekers were granted a visit from the Hon Luke Hartsuyker MP, Assistant Minister for Employment, and Karen Mcnamara MP, Federal Member for Dobell. They had the opportunity to speak directly to our government about the issues that matter to them locally and shed light on how community resources like the Hub are integral in breaking cycles of disadvantage for citizens experiencing long-term unemployment.

We are grateful for the opportunity to showcase the talents of our participants and to provide genuine opportunities for civic and social engagement and advocacy at a local level.

## **BFH - VOLUNTEERING**

The Better Futures Hub would not be where it is today without the dedication of a core group of volunteers. The voluntary workforce at the Hub has rapidly grown and continues to expand, as local people take up duties across childcare and creche support, administration, project-management and exhibit their skills and passions through the delivery of soft-entry programs and initiatives.

Eight regular volunteers now support the Hub across five days of service delivery. This not only allows the facility to function, but provides a valuable opportunity for local people to gain work-experience, hone job-readiness skills, socialise and meet like-minded people. For some, volunteering fosters aspirations to rejoin the workforce after a prolonged absence and builds confidence and capacity within a supportive environment.

One volunteer had been out of the workforce for a decade before volunteering as administrative support at the Hub. Throughout her 9 months with us, she was encouraged to commence a medical terminology course through Hunter TAFE. Proving the value of tenacity and hard work, she was successful in gaining a position as a medical receptionist, ahead of 500+ applicants and believes her volunteering was essential in improving her employability.

**THANK YOU TO OUR INCREDIBLE VOLUNTEERS, WHO MAKE US PROUD EVERY DAY WITH THEIR PASSION, HUMOUR AND GOODWILL!**







## ALL THINGS FINANCE

2015 saw the creation of All Things Finance, Australia's first Not-For-Profit accounting firm! Established as an affiliated business of Youth Connections, All Things Finance provides the local community with comprehensive and affordable accounting, book-keeping and taxation services. Aligned to the principles of social enterprise, it funnels profits back into community causes; namely Youth Connections and our array of youth transition programs.

All Things Finance is committed to empowering young people to enter the financial sector and establish fulfilling career pathways. Becoming an employer of choice for our Structured Workplace Learning Program, All Things Finance has taken on multiple Year 11 and 12 students as they study Business Administration. Through hands-on learning in a real-life workplace environment, work-placement students have gained new skills across administration and basic accounting software including MYOB.

A huge undertaking for this social enterprise was the successful execution of a crowdfunding campaign. Working in partnership with the ING Direct

Dreamstarter program. All Things Finance reached out to our dynamic community to make the vision of the All Things Finance Business College a reality.

The ATF Business College is envisioned as an earning and learning environment that can offer professional, industry-recognised training to youth, job-seekers, those looking for a career change or a chance to consolidate their skill-set in the accounting industry. This College would be co-located with our firm, to allow students the opportunity to access genuine and sustained work-placements and immerse themselves in a professional work culture. Following the successful completion of their diploma in Accounting, 50% of graduates will be guaranteed employment. This is an incredible employment outcome, which can kick-start a thriving career in Finance.

Thanks to our incredible supporters, we reached AND exceeded our target for the ATF Business College, with a grand total of \$11,125! We appreciate the commitment of every one of our funders and look forward to establishing the college in 2016.



## CONTACT US

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Green Central  
Gate 1, Kangoo Rd, Kariong NSW 2250



+ (02) 4346 1111



[admin@youthconnections.com.au](mailto:admin@youthconnections.com.au)



[www.facebook.com/youthconnections.com.au](http://www.facebook.com/youthconnections.com.au)

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