



# YOUTH CONNECTIONS .COM.AU

Annual Report 2014

Everyone  
has a story  
to tell...



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For an interactive look at the YC Annual Report visit our digital site. You can 'like, comment and share' each story with your networks via social media.

You will also discover more photos and videos about our programs and our young people.



## Vision

Every young person can achieve a purposeful future.

## Mission

Leading communities in creating environments where young people can achieve purposeful futures through economic, social and civic participation.

## 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.

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

Green Central – Gate 1, Kangoo Rd, Kariong NSW 2250

T: (02) 4346 1111 F: (02) 4346 1112

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

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

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

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Words: Charlotte Dickie, Ruby Wharton

Design: Erin Ritchens

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# Org chart

youthconnections.com.au



## Board of Directors

Chair	Deputy Chair	Treasurer	Secretary	Directors
Pat Lewis	Victor Lee	Ian Carruthers	Marj Kong	Ann Byrne Richie Hadfield



## Advisory Committees

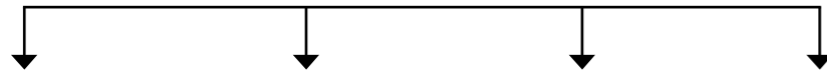
<b>Youth Reference Group</b>	<b>Aboriginal Youth Reference Group</b>
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**CEO**  
Maggie MacFie

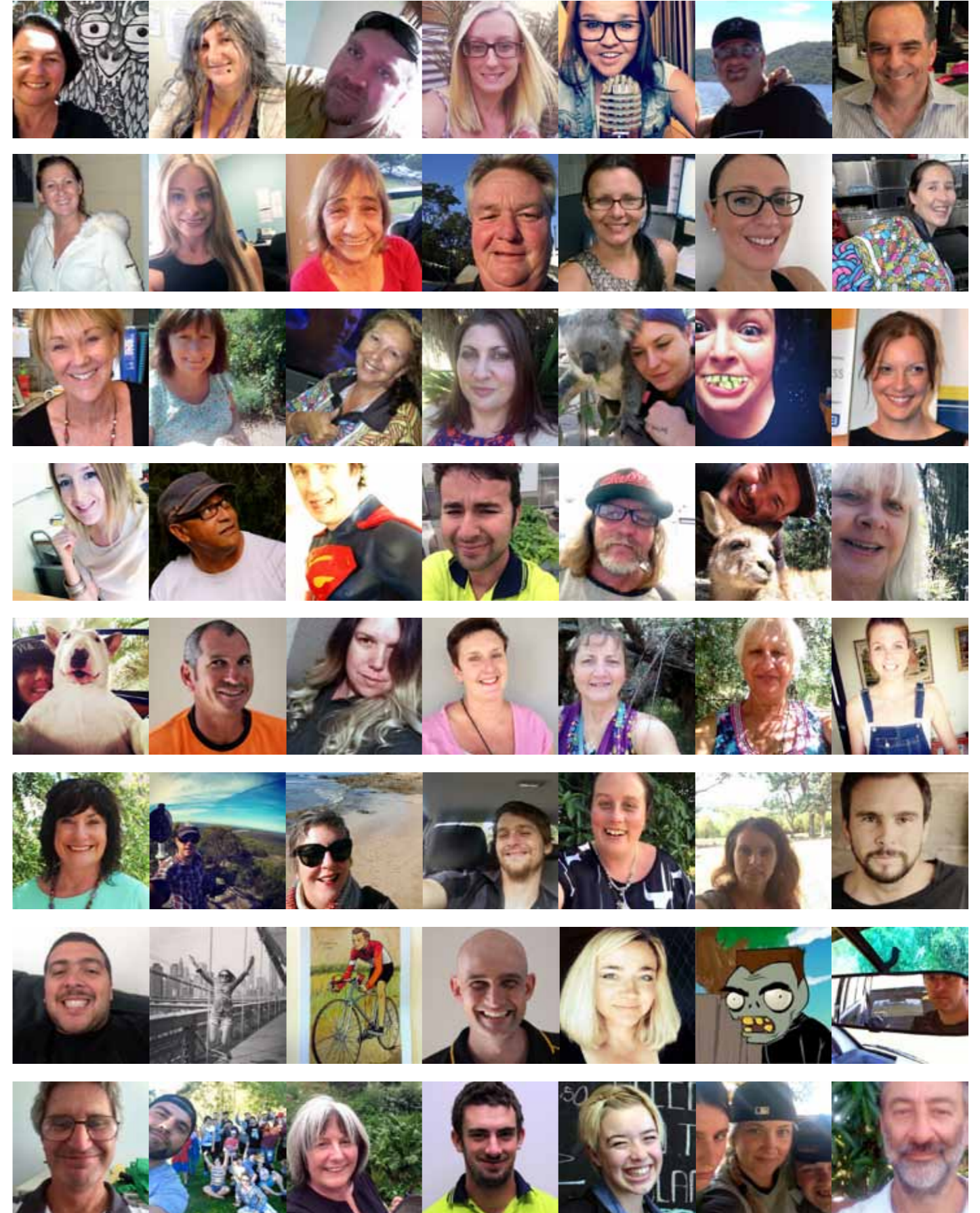
## Board of Directors

Andy Grauner  
Mick Pittman  
Lyn Simpson  
Jack Fletcher  
Steve Collins  
Alison Preece



Youthconnections.com.au	YC Industry Link Pty Ltd	yG Enterprise Pty Ltd	BISEE Pty Ltd	Bara Barang Corporation Ltd
Disability Services + TTW + Transition Support + Skool's Out + T-Team + Brokerage Partnership Brokers + School + Business + Community Youth Connections Program + Connectors + Board Endorsed Year 10 + NG Central (stage 5) BoS Uplift Digital Better Futures Hub	GTO RTO Structured Workplace Learning YC Media The Skills Generator	Car Cleaning Construction Events/PR Graphic Design Horticulture Mechanical Engineering Driving School	Administration Finance HR Payroll	Freedom Ride 2011 Indigenous Skills Centre Koori Connect Aboriginal Tourism and Cultural Education The Coolamon on Green Central Aboriginal Sport and Recreation Financial Counselling

# Staff selfies



# CEO REPORT



## Maggie MacFie

My dear colleagues, friends and supporters of youthconnections.com.au and its subsidiary companies, this will be the last communicate from me as the organisation's CEO.

For the past 20 years I have worked in this region as a practitioner, advocate and social entrepreneur creating opportunities for young people as they transition from school to the world of work. These opportunities ensure our young people create for themselves a purposeful future, which allows them to be full and productive economic, social and civic contributors in our community. This of course, is our mission, and I am a proud and committed mission 'cheerleader'.

As I reflect over my career, I see four pillars underpinning all the important work we do.

The first relates to positive educational outcomes for all young people. As an organisation, we have long acknowledged the evidence behind the need for young people to complete a Year 12 or its equivalent. Equally, we understand that a Year 12 alone cannot be the measurement of success, aspiration or even evidence of satisfactory educational experiences throughout a young person's school life. To that end, we have created alternative learning environments, experiential learning opportunities and work experiences through social enterprise where young people learn and earn. Positive educational outcomes can equally be a successful transition to further training or employment, improved literacy and numeracy, establishing a relationship with a mentor, or finding and valuing friendships and relationships with peers, teachers or significant

others. Positive educational outcomes will also be realised when barriers to educational attendance and attainment are removed. These barriers can include mental health issues, drug and alcohol dependence, homelessness, domestic violence and parenting. Where barriers to learning exist, youthconnections.com.au has traditionally provided intensive case management support and referral.

The second pillar is a commitment to ensuring our young people have exposure to vocational learning and real work experiences. Since 1995 youthconnections.com.au has coordinated the work placements of students studying vocational subjects for their HSC. Today we place over 5,000 young people annually with the support and good will of over 2,500 employers from the bottom of Lake Macquarie to the Sydney Harbour Bridge. For many young people, this is the first taste of a real work environment and this experience, combined with their rigorous vocational study, means they will exit Year 12 with an understanding and appreciation of the pathway requirements for their chosen vocation. Many will also have a Certificate II or III in their employability 'toolbox' which combined with real life work experience, places them at the front of the employment queue. For other young people exiting school without any vocational learning and not pursuing a university placement, then TAFE or a Registered Training Organisation enrolment must be the next step on the pathway to employment. Vocational learning underpins all employment.

The third pillar relates to the preparation we offer young people that gives them the confidence to apply for employment, compete with other applicants and be successful. Our youth job brokerage ensures our young people have access to an employment case manager. This case manager initiates a transition to employment plan with stated goals and aspirations. Young people are encouraged to undertake and



are referred to vocational learning opportunities, have their resumes prepared, are referred to job vacancies, tutored on interview technique, instructed on work etiquette and employer expectations and followed up and monitored to ensure morale and confidence remains high. Our employment case managers arrange work trials, follow up interview outcomes, canvass and advocate on behalf of young job seekers and provide post-employment placement support. For many young people who have no family connections and who do not know how to navigate the job market, youthconnections.com.au job brokerage is their best chance of acquiring and staying in employment.

The fourth pillar is to have engagement with business, education and community to ensure there is a whole of community approach to youth transition. Innovation would not have been possible at youthconnections.com.au without this whole of community approach. A prime example is the TradeStart program. This initiative is a partnership between Erina High School and youthconnections.com.au. It is an alternative Year 11 operating at Green Central by Erina High School and attracting disengaged young people from high schools across the region. Youthconnections.com.au provides intensive case management support for students and connects community services to those with barriers to learning and engagement. Community organisations, community volunteers and community workers support the students to ensure positive outcomes. Employers are engaged to provide work experience and employment opportunities. For the young people involved in this program it is the best chance they will have to become an economic, social and civic contributor to our community. Another example is the Better Futures Hub. This initiative is home to a school for young parents, a vocational training centre, early learning centre, crèche and parenting support services, a café and social enterprise business centre. This

whole of community approach allows for young parents to complete an HSC with St Philip's Christian College, have their children minded onsite at the purpose built early learning centre, undertake vocational learning with a reputable RTO to establish a career pathway, have a soft employment entry point through the onsite social enterprises, be mentored and supported by industry volunteers and to be allowed the opportunity to develop the skills to be the best parent they can be. This remarkable initiative not only changes the lives of young parents, it raises the aspirations and expectations of their children. Every day for most of their formative years, the children see their parent engaged in education, training or employment. This exposure will break the cycle of generational welfare dependence and social exclusion forever.

For many of the staff in youthconnections.com.au the last year has been a great challenge. For me, the discontinuation of youth transition funding from the Federal Government into 2015 is a great disappointment. The challenge of envisioning an organisation and making the structural adjustments to continue our good work post government funding has not been without heart break; mainly around the loss of assistance to the young people we serve. However, that process of imagining another way to do our business has been rewarding. In fact, each and every staff member has been stretched to conceiving alternatives to current practice that are cost efficient yet effective. Each staff member has risen to this personal and professional challenge and I thank them all.

I thank also our Directors. Your persistence and resilience in the current political and economic climate is inspiring. I leave the organisation in very capable hands.

# BOARD REPORT



## Pat Lewis

The past year has seen many successes highlighted by the successful launch of our school, NG Central, the Better Futures Hub at Wyong, and the opening of The Skills Generator at West Gosford.

Led by Andrea Cingi, NG Central has had a very successful year with its initial offering of an alternate learning environment for Years 9 and 10 students. The unique setting at Green Central with onsite, contextual learning, dedicated teachers, and individual pastoral support has suited the students' learning styles and needs and has set us up well for our expansion to Year 11 in 2015. This will be aided by the acquisition and development of the Skills Generator at West Gosford where some of these students will study.

The Better Futures Hub has been a magnificent success allowing young mothers, and fathers, to continue their education while having an onsite crèche and pre-school for their infant children. The centre also provides additional services to the local community and is wonderfully coordinated and lead by Manager, Liz McMinn.

2015 promises new programs and we anticipate additional opportunities to serve our Indigenous young people through a close association with Bara Barang.

We are saddened to announce that we will be losing our inspirational CEO, Maggie MacFie who has, over almost 20 years, led us to be the most diverse, best practice youth service organisation in the country. Maggie is the country's 'go to person' in relation to programs to support at risk young

people, represents government on influential panels, and is first to be asked to trial new programs in this field. Her imagination and drive to succeed locally has lead to YC delivering innovative solutions to address the needs of our young people which others would never have envisioned – Green Central, Koori Connect, Ngaruki Gulgul (NG) Central, Better Futures Hub, The Skills Generator and so much more. Coupled with this has been Maggie's passion for the young people we work with and for her colleagues within our organisation for the great potential they have within them. Maggie has by no means developed YC to its limits but feels that it is time to spread her wings to a greenfield site in Broome, WA where she will bring great delight and progress to Indigenous communities there. Having benefitted from her vision and activism for so long in the years she has worked with us, we can hardly deny her now this opportunity and we wish her well. We have not heard the last of Maggie MacFie and will look forward to following her progress to even greater achievement.

Our organisation has worked cohesively at all levels to create strategies to overcome the Federal funding loss of the Youth Connections and Partnership Brokers programs. We applaud the work of our Directors who have all supported our organisation strongly, providing expert governance in future planning and our vision in supporting our young people.

Thank you to all who have contributed to our work this year as we march into 2015. I look forward to being able to share in these new opportunities with you and to consolidate the great organisation which youthconnections.com.au is.

# Board bios

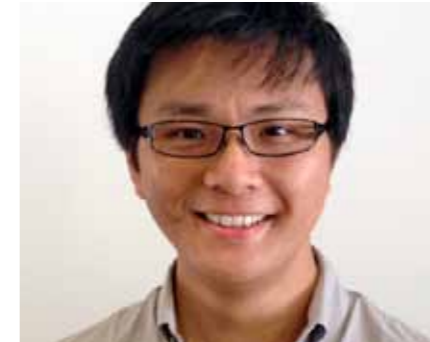
## Pat Lewis



### Chair

Pat is a former secondary education principal and teacher with more than 40 years experience. Throughout his career Pat was involved in Vocational Education and Training (VET) in schools at District and Regional levels. Pat has strong ties with Rotary and has extensive networks on the Central Coast. He believes very strongly in the potential of all young people and is willing to provide opportunities and encouragement to them, especially those who have not had their learning needs met by the school system.

## Victor Lee



### Deputy Chair

Victor is our youngest member of the board who has volunteered, been employed and involved in a range of corporate and not-for-profit organisations in the youth sector. These include CEO of the Inspire Foundation, Vice-Chairperson for The Shack Youth Services and currently, General Manager of Knowmore. As an advocate for the youth sector throughout his life and career, Victor looks forward to playing a bigger role in grass roots community organisations and alternative education frameworks.

## Richie Hadfield



### Director

Richie joined the youthconnections.com.au Board after playing a significant role in the inception of Bara Barang Corporation Ltd. He has over 10 years of financial sector experience - working and consulting on strategy, product development, process management and technology projects. Richie is currently an employee of the Commonwealth Bank and involved with Jawun Indigenous Corporate Partnerships. He has a strong drive for providing opportunities for young people.

## Ian Carruthers



### Treasurer

Ian Carruthers (PSM) had a 40 year career with the Australian Government serving as a senior executive. He is the Chair of the Board for a national research facility and is a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Ian has a strong interest in advancing the opportunities and interests of young Australians and provides vision and strength to the board.

## Marj Kong



### Secretary

Marj is a former secondary school principal with 35 years experience in adolescent education. She is passionate about creating viable future options for young people, meeting their needs and aspirations and offering them opportunities to grow and clarify their direction in life.

## Anne Byrne



### Director

Anne has 18 years experience with not-for-profit organisations and has established several committees in the education and employment sector. She has a passion in developing better opportunities for young people to reach their full potential.



**NG  
CENTRAL  
SCHOOL**

**Ngaruki Gulgul, otherwise known as 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 and 10 along with a vocational Certificate I qualification.**

**Central to the philosophy of NG Central is the belief that practical work combined with vocational instruction, and a view to genuine production and sales, will enhance participants' motivation to learn and become positive and fully integrated citizens of our community.**

**Participants develop their learning, personal, social and professional skills with their barriers to engagement treated in a holistic manner.**



# Certificate I Conservation and Land Management

**Ngaruki Gulgul school encouraging positive youth development through outdoor learning**

In 2013, Ian Sutton from Equilibrium Future Solutions began working with young people from youthconnections.com.au, helping them to gain skills in conservation and land management through community projects such as the maintenance of the Bateau Bay Community Garden. Today, Ian and his assistant Cody are employed by youthconnections.com.au to work with NG Central school students teaching a Certificate I in Conservation.

"I began teaching the Conservation and Land Management (CALM) course in March 2014. Cody and I took the students away from their classrooms at Green Central and into the bush. We took them on long bush walks, which was essentially the beginning of their ecology lessons."

The course, a mixture of practical training and theory, gives students the opportunity to engage with alternative learning methods and develop qualifications. Ian believes the students are more productive when theory is delivered outdoors.

"The students undertake theory lessons in the Strickland State Forrest, or sometimes in the yarning circle at Green Central. It seems to have a calming affect on the students and they are far more productive than when they are in the classroom."

Cody, course supervisor and teachers aid says he has seen a big improvement in the attitude and behaviours of the students since he started working with them.

"I used to be just like these kids, until one day I turned my life around. Because my background is similar to theirs, they find that they can relate to me. I'm a role model to them."

"I have built up a strong rapport with them and they trust me, I am helping them to learn new skills and am also offering an ear for any problems they are having. I am helping them to see that life isn't as bad as they think it is. There's light at the end of the tunnel."

Ian is also a profound leader, role model and mentor for the students. He says he is passionate about working with these young people, who he claims 'have fallen through every crack' and is determined to give them hope.

"I believe that connecting kids to the land creates a sense of belonging to place. These kids need to feel like they belong before can start to learn and develop." NG Central students have since completed the CALM course and are working on a year-long project at Green Central, re-creating their designated smoking area and turning it into a beautiful landscaped garden and hang-out spot.

"My theory is that if the kids create their own hang-out spot then they won't ruin it," says Ian.

"The plan is to have two canopies of plants, a water catchment, a graffiti wall, a bin bay made from stone, built in ash-trays, a bird bath and an archway with grape plants growing around it. It will also be a mini-food forest and we will grow plants and fruits that the students can eat, such as strawberries and tomatoes."

# THE COOLAMON ON GREEN CENTRAL

The Coolamon on Green Central is training café for youth to learn about the hospitality industry. It supports students on structured work placement and work experience and provides NG Central school students with the opportunity to gain a Certificate I in hospitality and additional certificates such as barista.



## Café Culture at the Coolamon; training the budding baristas and chefs of tomorrow

I came to NG Central school at the beginning of 2014. I started training in The Coolamon in February and have since grown to love it. I mostly work in the kitchen, preparing food and serving customers. I've also done a little bit of barista, but cooking is definitely my strong point.

I am studying a Certificate I in Hospitality and am really enjoying myself. It's been a great experience working with Sarah (former Coolamon Manager) and the other kids. Sarah is a great teacher. She talks me through everything, and explains what I need to do. Deb, who has taken over the café since Sarah left is like a mum to me. I can talk to her confidently about things. She's so supportive and is always trying to help me to learn. I have my good days and bad days at school but when I come in (to the café) I always do my best and try to work hard.

Coming to NG Central school and working in The Coolamon has been the best decision. It's completely changed my life for the better. I don't know what would have happened to me if I had stayed at my old school.

I love the café. Even when I'm not working (in the café) I like to

go in and chill out there. It's a good calming place for me.

Green Central is totally different to anywhere I've ever been. She always says hello and takes time out of her day to talk to me. She makes me feel like I belong and makes me feel important. Since I came to this school I have been getting better grades and good reports. It's really wonderful.

Deb Coade, Coolamon Manager, has been working with Ellie-May since March and says she has witnessed a positive change in her attitude since she began working in the café.

"Ellie-May has been a pleasure to work with this year. She struggled a little initially, but now I can see that she is enjoying what she's doing and I have seen a big transformation in her. She's a very talented baker and I focus my training with her on her strengths."

"The kids are all great kids. They make me smile everyday. Mostly they are eager to learn. It's awesome to see them enjoying what they're learning in the café. Some days they are really struggling with other areas of their schooling and then they come into the café to work and they are completely different kids. It's amazing to see."

*Ellie-May, 16*



# BARA BARANG CORPORATION LTD

Bara Barang is an Aboriginal organisation providing educational programs, training and services to Aboriginal people and youth on the Central Coast. It strengthens the community by encouraging participation and self-determination. Bara Barang works with the Aboriginal community to improve school retention, build leadership skills within Aboriginal people and youth and promote vocational learning and employment opportunities. Find out more at [www.barabarang.com.au](http://www.barabarang.com.au).



This plaque is to commemorate the inauguration of Bara Barang Corporation Ltd at Green Central, Kariong.

This plaque recognises the important role this corporation will have in improving the economic, social and cultural inclusion of Aboriginal people within the Region.

This plaque acknowledges youthconnections.com.au and the role its staff and Board have played in crafting an environment in which Bara Barang Corporation Ltd will create a self-determined and empowered community.

Andy Grauner  
Chair, Bara Barang Corporation Ltd  
Director, [youthconnections.com.au](http://youthconnections.com.au)  
26 March 2014





# yG ENTERPRISE

yG enterprise held an exciting community enterprise project at Green Central in June 2014 for Narara Valley High School students studying a Certificate II in Construction. The students gained hands on experience building picnic tables for the outdoor areas at Green Central and made dining tables for our onsite café, the Coolamon on Green Central. Students also built a model roofing frame for a tiling course and a frame for their school. yG enterprise aimed to provide a positive learning experience for the students allowing them to put skills learnt in the classroom into practice. The group of 10 students said they enjoyed the experience and said they would like to come to yG enterprise for a second work placement further down the track! If you join us in The Coolamon for lunch you might be surprised by the student's clever craftsmanship. Community enterprise projects help to develop enterprising and entrepreneurial skills in young people by linking them to projects that benefit local businesses and the community.



# WORK PLACEMENT

yG enterprise hosted another exciting project for Year 11 and 12 students from Tuggerah Lakes Secondary College for their Metals and Engineering work placement in May and June of 2014. The students were given access to our new training facility, the Skills Generator, at West Gosford. The students put their studies into practice, designing and constructing metal plaques from start to finish. The students had the opportunity to work with skilled boilermakers, learning new skills in the metals trade. The students also got to keep their plaques at the end of work placement. Structured Workplace Learning is funded by the NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training.





# YCIL INDUSTRY LINK

YC Industry Link Pty Ltd (YCIL) is a Group Training Organisation supporting young people through Apprenticeships and Traineeships. YCIL has been operating on the Central Coast for 8 years and has successfully placed hundreds of young people into Apprenticeships and Traineeships on the Central Coast, Sydney, Newcastle and Canberra. YCIL helps young people into careers in a variety of industries and provides regular support to ensure that young people successfully achieve each stage of their Apprenticeship or Traineeship.



# yJOB

yJob provided customised case management for young people aged 15-21 who were recent school leavers. It assisted youth in their transition into further training, education or employment.

yJob was funded by the Australian Government Department of Employment through the Local Employment Coordinator Flexible Funding Pool.

## School Based training leads to full-time Apprenticeship

I always knew I wanted to be a carpenter. My pop who influenced me, was a carpenter and I knew from an early age that I would go down the same path as him. That's why when I had the opportunity to completed a School Based Apprenticeship with YC Industry Link, I took it 100% seriously.

I started my School Based Apprenticeship when I was in Year 10 at Berkeley Vale Community High School. I started work at Green Central, which was then just a run-down abandoned site and helped to rebuild it. The project went for six weeks and I learnt a huge amount about carpentry during that time. It made me really keen to jump into a full-time apprenticeship, but I returned to Year 11 to continue my studies until something came up for me.

School just wasn't my thing, I found it really hard to stay engaged and I was impatient and wanted to start working. I thought about how good it would be to be on a work-site, earning money, and learning from people in the industry. So I was absolutely stoked when I was offered a full-time

apprenticeship with Bailey and Morris Construction.

The School Based Apprenticeship I did with YC Industry Link really helped set me up to complete a full-time apprenticeship; it helped prepare me for the workforce. I had expectations already and knew what my employers would expect from me.

I recently completed the fourth year of my apprenticeship, employed by YC Industry Link and still love it. I definitely feel in my element, even though it's hard work five days a week and we do some pretty long shifts. I love what I do so I'm pretty lucky.

I really like the people I work for; you're only as good as your bosses and Benji and John are really cool dudes. They've taught me a lot and it's great to get feedback from two people who are actually in the industry every day. Now I do sub-contracting work on weekends as well, so their support has been great for that. I'd definitely tell a kid like me when I was in school, that if you want something and you aren't afraid to work really hard for it and seek out the good opportunities around, then it'll happen for you for sure.

*Chris, 21*

## Bright, young career-seeker gains full-time employment with the help of yJob

I graduated from Henry Kendall High School last year and wasn't too sure what I wanted to do. I thought I'd try my hand at a trade, but I didn't realise how hard that can be when you're doing it on your own. I didn't really know where to start.

I got involved with YC Industry Link Pty Ltd through their yJob program in April 2014. I worked with Deb Hetherington and Debbie Thompson at Green Central, Kariong and they helped me with job-searching, job-matching, work experience and resume writing. I did some work experience in Business Administration at the YC Industry Link office and found that I really liked it, as well as a day's work at a local landscaping company. It was good to actually get out in a real workplace to see what suited me best.

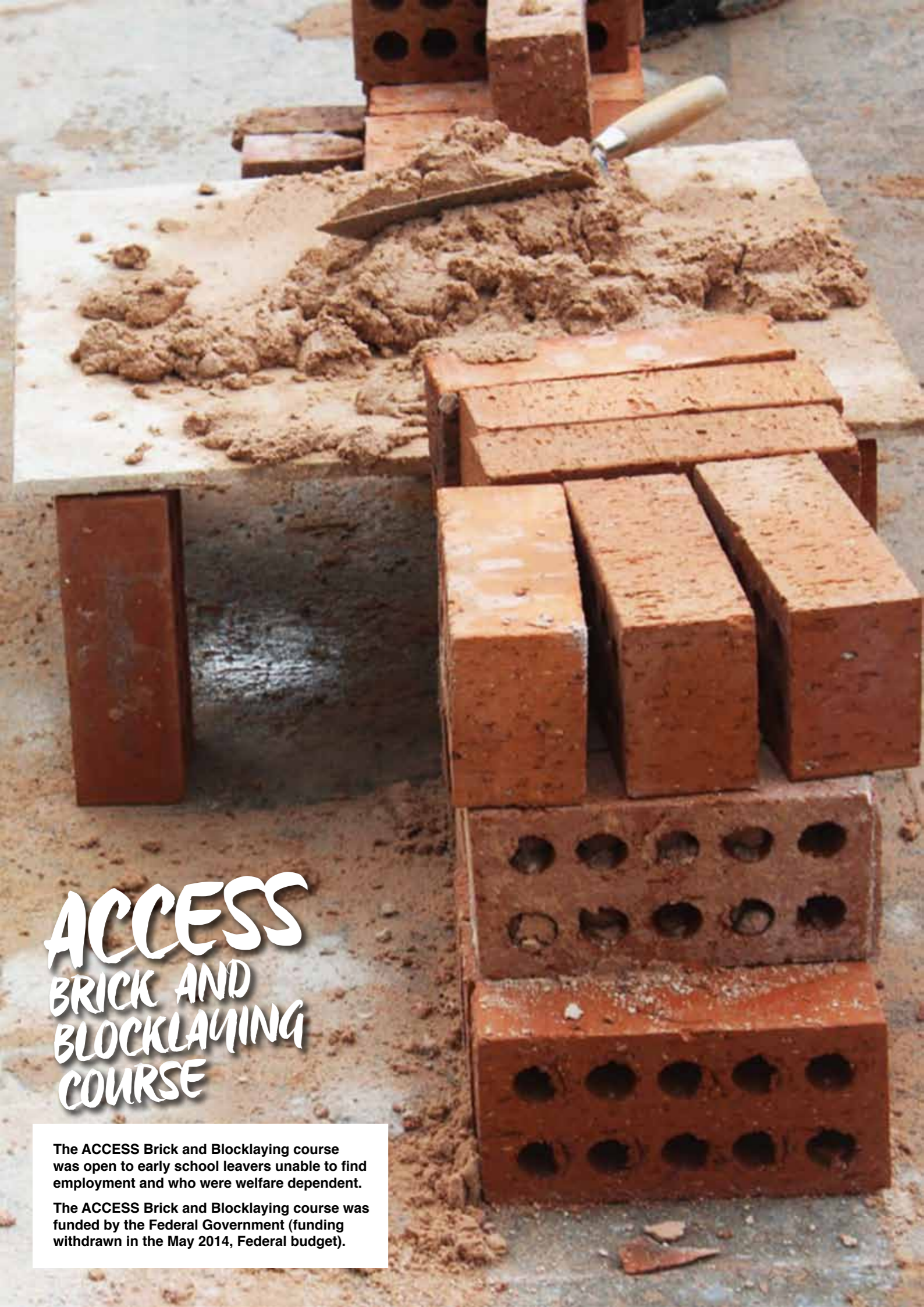
A part-time administration position came up at Challenge Community Services in East Maitland and I got heaps of assistance from Deb at yJob when it came to editing my resume and writing a cover letter. That bit was pretty hard, so it was good to get advice. I was successful in receiving the part-time position and within about four weeks, a full-time

position became available. I was still in contact with yJob, so we worked out how to adapt my resume to the job criteria and next thing I knew, I was working 9-5pm, five days a week. Man, it feels pretty adult!

It's definitely a different world to high school, but it suits me because I like being able to go to work, take care of my responsibilities there with a good team and then to be able to go home, relax and enjoy my weekend. My mates are jealous of my paycheck too. I feel more independent and confident and feel like this job could be helpful to guide me through to the next step in my career. I would like to enter the police force at some point, so I'm hoping my experience working in community services here at Challenge will give me some helpful skills to break into that in the future.

Deb Hetherington said of Blake, 'He was such a lovely young man to be around and we could see from the start that he had a bright future, so it was great to see him improve and succeed with not only gaining part-time employment, but transforming that into a full-time role so quickly'. She said that her and the YC Industry Link Pty Ltd team were 'very proud of him and glad to say he's doing well'.

*Blake, 19*



# ACCESS BRICK AND BLOCKLAYING COURSE

The ACCESS Brick and Blocklaying course was open to early school leavers unable to find employment and who were welfare dependent.

The ACCESS Brick and Blocklaying course was funded by the Federal Government (funding withdrawn in the May 2014, Federal budget).



## Laying the foundations for employment opportunities in the Brick and Blocklaying Industry

I was a TradeStart student at youthconnections.com.au for the first half of my preliminary HSC year when I heard about the ACCESS Brick and Blocklaying course. I started off with a one-week taster course to see if I would be interested in doing the full three weeks. It ended up being a really good experience and I learnt heaps that I could use when I started full-time work.

Our trainer Nigel Crooke was great, he knows exactly what he's talking about and dealt it to us straight so we know what to expect in a job-site. But everything was fun, I was with good guys and knew some of them from TradeStart and school, so we had a blast.

From that point, I did some painting work experience which gave me even more of a taster of being in the workforce and from there, YC Industry Link referred me to EasyScape; a local landscaping business. I went for a trial and was successful in getting the job. I love what I do, and it's so different to school. It suits me because I like being able to do hard work and then have something concrete to show for it. And the paycheck goes alright too! My boss is a really good guy and you learn a bit more each week, so I'm looking forward to the rest of my apprenticeship.

The ACCESS course was a great way for me to get ready for my apprenticeship, I wouldn't have been able to do half the stuff I can now do at my work without learning it for those few weeks. It was also really good for me to see what it takes to be on an actual work-site. It prepares you for how physically demanding bricklaying can be and what's expected of you; so when you're on an actual job, you're in the know. I also wouldn't have known where to start to look for an apprenticeship. Without the course, I might not have made the connections with YC Industry Link, which helped me break into the workforce to start making some money.

The Bricklaying Australia Apprentice ACCESS program was with Brick Training Australia (BTA) and YC Industry Link in May 2014. Students completed a three week (150 hours of accredited pre-vocational training) course with BTA and worked towards a Statement of Attainment for Certificate III in Bricklaying. Students were provided support to secure employment within the industry. Work experience was an important component of pre-employment training, exposing students to the work place. The objective is for participants to find and hold an Apprenticeship.

*Dean, 17*



SoundCloud  
SCAN HERE



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.

Structured Workplace Learning is funded by the NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training.

**YC Media gets a shake-up with singer song-writer Mike McCarthy on board**

YC Media's manager and producer Mike McCarthy, who is also a well-known singer and song-writer, was head-hunted by youthconnections.com.au in early 2014, upon the departure of YC Media's dearly-loved and long term senior producer Marg Meehan. Although Marg was a major sustaining factor of YC Media for many years, Mike slipped in to the position comfortably and brought new energy and his own creative genius to the program.

Mike, a passionate and talented professional in the music industry, has had prior experience working with youth and upon starting at YC Media instantly became a favourite amongst the students. On his first week as a host, Terrigal High students baked him a cake to thank him for offering the best work placement they had ever experienced.

Mike says 2014 has brought about exciting prospects for students studying Entertainment, and says he is enjoying offering students the opportunity to produce a one-hour radio program for a local community radio station as well as helping students to develop skills in film, graphics and photography.

"At YC Media the students are continuing to record a one hour show for CoastFM 96.3. That's still our main objective. At the same time we've also been adding in more film work and sound recording. We are making a CD to be distributed at the end of the year which will showcase the music created by some of our exceptionally talented students."

"As well as producing weekly radio programs, Entertainment students have also been involved in a number of client projects for community groups and organisations on the Central Coast. This year the students have provided photography for the

Central Coast Try'a'Skill and have also helped to produce a three-part documentary for YC Industry Link on the pre-vocational bricklaying course run out of The Skills Generator in May this year."

Not only have the students been developing their skills at external events, Mike says the students have also had a number of visitors to Green Central, and have been showing off their interviewing skills to Central Coast politicians including Karen McNamara MP, Federal Member for Dobell and Chris Holstein Member for Gosford.

"The students also nabbed an interview with Senator Scott Ryan, who visited youthconnections.com.au all the way from Canberra in June."

Mike says he has hosted some exceptionally talented students this year, and has enjoyed helping them to reach their full potential.

"Terrigal High School have some very talented musicians – whilst on work placement the students recorded a few songs, did some live performances, and Jai, a very talented graphic designer and film producer, put a lot of work into producing the bricklaying documentary. The talent really has been incredible."

"Bonnie Grace, a singer and song writer from Tuggerah Lakes Secondary College the Entrance Campus, is another very talented student. Her music will feature on the Christmas CD this December."

If you would like to check out the music being produced by this year's talented cohort, scan the QR code on the opposite page to be taken to the YC Media SoundCloud page.

*Mike - Manager*



# PB PARTNERSHIP BROKERS

Partnership Brokers play an important role in bringing people together from all corners of the community to ensure our young people are supported in their efforts to engage and contribute economically, socially and civically. Our Partnership Brokers facilitate partnerships with schools and training organisations, business and industry, community organisations, parents and families so that young people have the best possible opportunity to attain their potential at school and beyond.

The Partnership Broker program was funded by the Federal Government (funding withdrawn in the May 2014, Federal budget).



## Exploring the Edge; unlocking the potential of alternative education

I met with Darryl Buchanan and Leanne Woodley from the Association of Independent Schools NSW in July this year to discuss further support for the alternative education sector. The immediate response from Daryl and Leanne was 'how can we help' and in the blink of an eye, they had set the wheels in motion to host a Conference for alternative learning providers in New South Wales.

The Conference was called 'Exploring the Edge' and it proved to be a great success. The day was much appreciated by more than 60 delegates who came from various programs and education sectors across New South Wales. There were certainly plenty of inspirational speakers and success stories. We were fortunate to have speakers such as Dr Ani Wierenga

from Dusseldorp Forum present on new ways of measuring success in an alternative education setting. Delegates from the Central Coast region included the DALE Young Parents Program Wyong, ET Australia and NG Central.

The Conference made it easier for a diverse range of alternative education providers to come together and share information and resources, and participate in professional development specific to the sector. It is clear that the work in alternate learning environments benefits greatly from this type of collaboration and I continue to be inspired by the dedication of those that work in this field. Many thanks goes to partners such as the Association of Independent Schools NSW and Dusseldorp Forum for leading the way.

*Rosina, Partnership Broker*



# yDRIVE

yDrive is a learner driver mentor program aimed at providing support to learner drivers, who do not have access to a supervising driver or vehicle to gain the driving experience required to apply for a probationary licence. It was created to address youth unemployment on the Central Coast. The [youthconnections.com.au](http://youthconnections.com.au), Youth Reference Group coordinated yDrive as youth-led, youth-driven project.

yDrive is funded by NSW Government Youth Opportunities and NSW Transport.

## yDrive steering learners towards success

yDrive has been a massive help for me towards getting my licence. 120 hours is a pretty huge job especially when you're like me and you can't really access a car or someone to take you out driving all the time. yDrive is about helping young people like me get their hours up with a great instructor and supervisors who can help improve their skills. I think the program was really good because it kept my eyes on the prize - now after a lot of hard work I'm almost ready to sit my P's test and I can't wait to finally be able to hit the road soon!

The way I started off was by getting some training for my L's theory test, then after passing it and getting my shiny new permit (my photo had the ladies swooning), I had a few lessons with Ron, who is the yDrive qualified driving instructor. He takes you out and makes sure you know all the basic skills. Ron is an awesome instructor. He is hands-on and friendly, so he'll tell you your mistakes in a way that makes you realise what you can do better, but keeps you confident. He's a really lovely guy, I had 10 lessons with him which adds up to 30 hours of driving and it was a lot less stressful than going out with Dad in the car!

Once I was ready I went out with some of the mentor drivers, I'd often go with Charlotte and Rosina, who taught me heaps. They are really friendly and patient which is good because it can be hard remembering everything you're learning all at the same time, so you need someone there to remind you and take things step by step with you. Ron has also been doing some

lessons with me now that I'm so close to completing my test, to make sure I'm fully ready to go.

I also got to complete the Safe Drivers Course at the PCYC, which is usually \$140 but was paid for by yDrive. You do some theory and a two hour driving lesson. This was really helpful because it was very practical which is good for me; I like learning hands-on skills.

Now that I'm confident, I love driving. I can't get enough of it, but I could do without reverse parking haha! I think doing the program has really helped me because having my licence is so important, especially because I'm a tradie. If I have my licence, then they can send me to other work-sites, I can be independent and I don't have to walk to work or always be asking for lifts! It's going to allow me to achieve more and definitely going to be good for work - at my current job and also into the future. I feel really thankful for the opportunity - it's been a massive help in pushing me to get my hours up; I probably would have lost motivation without it because it was a struggle to go out driving with supervision at home.

But my biggest achievement is that I've now saved and bought my own car! I put every penny, cent and paycheck into it and then was able to walk out of the bank with all my money and pay for a Toyota Hilux ute. She's my baby, sitting in my garage as we speak and I can't wait to take her out for a spin. Everyone watch out, Mark's hitting the road! I'll have to take Ron out for a drive to say thank you.

*Mark, 25*



## SKOOL'S OUT AND T-TEAM

**Skool's Out is a social networking and peer support program for young people with a disability. The program assists young people to form new friendships, find new interests and gain skills all under the guidance and support of our experienced staff.**

**T-Team is an after school and vacation care program for high school students with a disability. The program allows young people to form social networks and participate in entertaining, age-appropriate activities under the supervision of qualified facilitators.**

**Skool's Out and T-Team are funded by the NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care.**



### Rono helps youth to form new friendships and gain new skills and experience

Working with our young people, I am constantly learning. These kids teach me new things every day. They're so tough, funny and often I'm surprised by how fearless they are. The activities we do with them are designed to push past comfort zones, to get them to try new things and introduce variety and fun into what can be a tightly structured lifestyle. The kids are rarely phased, they leap into challenges and that's when you realise that whilst we deal with a lot of parents who are understandably resistant to letting their children go out into the world and who have quite a few fears about their safety and security, well the kids I work with don't have these fears. The kids I work with just want to do everything that all young people do – hang out with their friends, socialise, make jokes and have fun. We make sure our programs reflect that if it isn't fresh, fun and something that a teenager would love doing, then it's not for us. We want to do stuff that young people think is cool, because if they are excited and want to be there, they'll get the most benefit out of the experience we are offering.

I work really well with my team, we are a young team, on the pulse, and we know what the kids like and want to do. The greatest part is that we all involve ourselves 100% in everything we do and what we offer to our young people. You'll never find us sitting on the sideline drinking coffee and turning a blind eye to the kids having fun. We're there 100%, having fun with them too. My staff are the ones hollering the loudest, running the fastest, daring the kids on and just being mates with them. That's what sets us apart from other services. Our kids respond so well to us being on their level.

One of our most successful initiatives is our annual Abilities camp, which is funded by the wonderful people at Central Coast Care Respite. This year's camp took place at Myuna Bay and Recreation Centre and 25 kids from both our Wyong and Gosford regions attended. We like to think of the camp as a holiday away from home. It's less of a structured environment

and is about getting kids out of their comfort zones and doing things they might not normally get the chance to do while they engage with their peers. It's about the kids gaining independence too, getting them used to tackling challenges by themselves and also helping their parents to adjust to them growing up and going out in to the world. The activities involved swimming, archery, kayaking, dance parties, and team building exercises.

Our Vacation Care program operates on a very similar idea; it's a chance for our young people to socialise, try new things and have access to experiences which can help them grow as people and as friends. We base what we do around their abilities, not their disabilities. And it's the coolest thing to see a kid rise to the challenge and test their limits. We've done everything on Vacation Care from laser Skirmish, rock-climbing, high ropes course at Treetops Adventure Park, beach days, dolphin cruises and visiting the Sharks and Ray Centre in Port Stephens, Flip-out Trampoline Centre, setting world records at Singstar, visiting the Gamers Expo in the city- you name it we've done it.

And finally, there's nothing quite like our annual Halloween Disco. If you want to see some killer moves, this is where you should come. The night doubles as a networking support dinner for parents too, so the kids come along, hang out with their peers and bust out their best Beyoncé impressions. The kids parents get to relax and enjoy a fully catered dinner at The Coolamon, enjoy each others company, share stories and access support. We also invite a key speaker each year, which always gets a good response. It's definitely a release for parents too, to be around people who understand their daily challenges, joys and worries. This is one time the team is always ready to let loose and challenge the kids to a good old fashioned dance-off. It's a celebration and it's a reminder every young person deserves these kinds of experiences; who doesn't have fond memories of their own awkward, adolescent discos right?

**Rono - Coordinator**

# HALLOWEEN DISCO



## TTW TRANSITION TO WORK

### Abilities program participant and young go-getter Nicole Bracken awarded for outstanding vocational training commitment

I have been at [youthconnections.com.au](http://youthconnections.com.au) in the Abilities programs since 2006. I started out in the Skool's Out program, where I remained for 5 years, before moving into the Transition to Work program for another 3 years. I have learnt so much from both of the programs; they've helped my confidence, employability and have given me a resume that a lot of other young people would envy!

I have gained a lot of work experience opportunities which has helped me transition from high school into the real work force and means that I am much more likely to be employed. I've had hospitality experience with Meals on Wheels, retail experience at The Body Shop, experience in disability work at Camp Breakaway, Sunnyfield and Fairhaven and Hammond Care and Time Banking have offered me some valuable experience in the aged care field. It's great to actually get some hands-on experience, because it can be really hard to know what you want to do for a career after school. And even if you do know, it's impossible to be really employable if you don't have any work experience.

Now I have certificate qualifications in Aged Care and Disability Work and I also received some special recognition, including encouragement awards in Certificate III in Disability Work, \$500 Outstanding Achievement in Aged Care and an Art Impressibility Award.

The Transition To Work program helped me expanding my resume and becoming job-ready, but a lot of what's changed is to do with my confidence. I really like being involved in the different activities, I have met some nice people and I always feel like I'm supported. If I'm struggling, or I have questions and need help, there's always a team who can help me out.

I think my dream job would be supporting young people who have disabilities, because I want people to know that just because you might have a disability doesn't mean that you can't contribute really good things to your community. I'm also interested in working with the older generation who suffer from dementia. It feels good to contribute to my community and I'd really like to be able to say I'm financially independent and making a difference.

*Nicole, 21*



# TTW TRANSITION TO WORK

The Transition to Work program provides Year 12 school leavers with a disability access to a range of group and individual activities and opportunities to assist in their transition to employment. The program supports young people into further education and helps students to develop employability skills, independent living skills and literacy and numeracy skills. The program also provides links to other services and job placement.

Transition to Work is funded by the NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care.



## Learning life skills and getting creative in the kitchen with Chef Chris

Entering the Transition to Work classroom, I am greeted with the heavenly aroma of chicken and spinach pie as it wafts in waves toward me.

The students are on a 10 minute break and supervisor Chris Sherd is keeping an eye on the pies that are slowly browning in the oven.

Chris welcomes me into the room and tells me to have a seat on the sofa next to Taegan and Jason, two Transition to Work participants enrolled in Chris's cooking class, which takes place every Tuesday.

Chris, a chef for more than 35 years and former owner of various and restaurants and cafes on the Central Coast, was approached by Abilities Manager Ashley McGeorge in 2013 and asked if he wanted to volunteer teaching cooking lessons to Transition to Work participants.

Chris was excited by the opportunity and has since been teaching cooking lessons and helping participants to gain independent living skills as well as helping them to develop employability skills.

"Working with the kids is a rewarding experience," Chris says,

as he pokes his head in the oven to check on the pies.

"The skills they are learning with me are skills that are transferable into the workforce and critical in everyday life. The kids are learning about hygiene, they are learning to be organised and are practicing time management."

Taegan, 18, who Chris says is never usually short for words, sits quietly opposite me, smiling shyly, and waiting for me to ask her what she loves about the program.

"I love cooking," she says, "It's so fun! It's a good learning experience and it's been good to share my new skills with my family."

"Chris has taught us how to make quiches, omelets, pizza, Asian cuisine and Indian cuisine. Lasagne and pizzas is my favourite thing to make."

Chris invites me to join the Transition to Work cooking class the following Tuesday and says the students will prepare lunch for me. He asks Taegan and Jason what they would like to make and they both say lasagne.

"We always have additional guests for lunch," Chris chuckles, "the staff get a whiff of what we're cooking and they come straight over for a feed, so feel free to invite yourself in anytime."

*Chris - TTW chef*



# TRANSITION SUPPORT PROGRAM

The Transition Support Program is for senior high school students with a disability. The program aims to give them confidence and skills so that when they reach Year 12 they are better prepared for life after school. Support workers work with students, family and the student's school to find out students strengths and interests. Support workers assist in finding work experience, advise students of career and trade expos and information sessions about work and vocational education and help students to broaden social networks.

The program is a partnership between [youthconnections.com.au](http://youthconnections.com.au), NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, NSW Department of Education and Communities, 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.



## Transition Support program boosts youth into the workforce

YC Transition Support workers Kim and Deanne provide help to senior high school students with a disability, giving them a variety of options and experiences aimed at better preparing them for life after school.

Kim says she's passionate about her role supporting youth with a disability and enjoys helping students to reach their full potential.

"My job is to help young people to develop skills that will eventually lead to an outcome, such as a career or further study. I enjoy helping to strengthen the students self-esteem and helping to create self-worth."

This year, Kim and Deanne have engaged students in a variety of activities such as career days, various courses and work experience opportunities.

In 2013, students from Hunter River High School, Newcastle High School and Wyong High School had the opportunity to participate in an excursion to Green Central to the 'Try A Trade' event.

Try A Trade allowed students gain experience in a variety of industries including horticulture, media, hospitality, construction, automotive and IT. The students were also treated to an official Welcome to Country and traditional smoking ceremony upon arrival. The event was a new and exciting experience for the students. Try A Trade is an example of one of the many ways Kim and Deanne support students to decide what they would like to do upon finishing high school.

Similarly, students also attended a course at Newcastle University where they were able to observe and try science, robotics, magic illusion and physical education in the gym. This gave them a taster into tertiary study and helped to moderate their expectations of what the world of higher education is all about.

Students also successfully completed a financial course, First Aid certificate and White Card and students from Newcastle High School and Cessnock High School have been enrolled in a Certificate II in Horticulture.

"As part of the Certificate II in Horticulture, Newcastle High School students are building a sensory garden gym and Cessnock High School students helped to build an Aboriginal learning centre."

Transition Support Program students also undertook work experience at Thou Walla Community Centre and at Anglicare's Scenic Lodge, to name a few.

At Anglicare's Scenic Lodge, Merewether, students gained skills in different areas including gardening, cleaning, hospitality, administration and aged care work.

Kim said it is a successful partnership between [youthconnections.com.au](http://youthconnections.com.au) and Anglicare's Scenic Lodge and the work experience was beneficial for students, staff and residents.

"The communication and inter-generational relationships that have been developed are great for students and residents alike, who really enjoy each other's company." said Kim.

Kim said some of the students even gained employment via completing work experience.

"One of our students was accepted into IPROWD, a specialist training program assisting Aboriginal people to gain entry to the NSW Police Academy at Goulburn. The student has since been accepted into the Police Academy in 2015 – it's an incredible achievement."

"Another student did work experience at PCYC Cessnock and has since gained part-time employment."

*Kim - Coordinator*



The Better Futures Hub supports the education, training and employment pathways of young parents and families experiencing long-term unemployment in the north of Wyong shire to enable them to create purposeful futures. Young parents and families can access high quality early learning, receive parenting advice and support, complete their Year 12, discover vocational pathways and be mentored and assisted into employment. Find out more at [www.betterfutureshub.com.au](http://www.betterfutureshub.com.au).

**Partners**

- Better Futures, Local Solutions – Local Advisory Group
- [youthconnections.com.au](http://youthconnections.com.au)
- St Philip's Christian College
- ET Australia
- Lighthouse Early Learning Centre
- Henry Kendall Group
- Benevolent Society

The Better Futures Hub is funded by the Australian Government Department of Human Services under the Better Futures, Local Solutions initiative.



