



**Submission to the Senate Select Committee  
Into the Abbott Government's Commission of Audit**

**Presented on behalf of the Youth Connections National Network (YCNN)**

Youth Connections is a federally funded programme administered by the Department of Education (formerly the Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations DEEWR). Youth Connections is delivered in 113 regions across Australia, by 65 Providers, covering every state and territory.

The Youth Connections programme generally assists young people aged 13-19 who are disengaged and inactive to reconnect to education, further training or in some instances, employment. Service delivery is characterised as youth focused, individualised intensive case management.

Youth Connections providers work with young people who present with multiple and complex barriers to engagement and who are highly vulnerable because of their at risk state. Barriers often include mental health issues, substance addiction, homelessness, poor literacy/numeracy, living in intergenerational poverty and contact with the juvenile justice system.

Youth Connections providers assist 30,000 young people annually in metropolitan, regional and remote Australia. Approximately 20% of the client case load identify as Indigenous.

Successful completion on the Youth Connections programme is known as a 'final outcome' which is recorded as a minimum 13 week reconnection to education, further training or employment. Approximately 60% of participants on the Youth Connections programme record a 'final' outcome.

In November 2013 the YCNN published destination data on 206 randomly surveyed young people who received a 'final outcome' from the programme in 2011. The data looked at the current education, employment status and living arrangements of those young people. The data found:

**Prior to starting with Youth Connections:**

- 128 respondents were disengaged and not attending school, 22 of which were disengaged for more than one year. The remaining 78 young people were still marginally connected to school but had frequent absences and were at high risk of disengagement

#### **Six months after Youth Connections:**

- **94.2%** of participants were still in education or employment.

#### **Two years after Youth Connections:**

- **81.5%** of participants were still in education or employment. Many of the remaining participants had moved into caring responsibilities
- The majority of respondents were not receiving any Centrelink benefits.

In January 2014 the YCNN collected a wider random sampling of 835 participants who received a 'final outcome' from the Youth Connections programme in 2012. Data was collected from every state and territory. We have colloquially named this data '*Class of 2012*'. The data revealed:

#### **Prior to starting with Youth Connections:**

530 respondents were disengaged and not attending school, 75 of which were disengaged for more than one year. The remaining 305 young people were still marginally connected to school but had frequent absences and were at high risk of disengagement.

#### **Six months after Youth Connections:**

- 93.4% (780) were still engaged in education or employment.
- 88.7% (109) of Indigenous participants were still engaged in education or employment.
- 188 of these young people recorded being in a traineeship or an apprenticeship.

#### **Eighteen months after Youth Connections:**

- 80.2% \*\*\*were still engaged in education or employment.
- 318 of these were engaged in either part time or full time employment including traineeships and apprenticeships.

#### ***Jay – Turning a Love of Art into a Career***

Jay commenced Youth Connections in August 2010 after leaving school during Year 10. Jay began Certificate 2 II but struggled in Maths and English and struggled to remain engaged because of the difficulties he experienced learning.

Jay did, however, draw amazing art work over his school booklets and it was clear that this was where his passion and talents lie.

Youth Connections staff helped Jay to stay focused on his numeracy and literacy, and encouraged him to develop an art portfolio. Jay hoped for an apprenticeship as a tattoo artist, however, it was difficult to get a start as work experience isn't allowed in the industry. Youth Connections helped Jay to find alternative pathways such as graphic design and upon exiting the programme Jay was assisted to find full time employment.

Shortly after leaving Youth Connections, Jay was offered his dream job of working as a tattooist where he is still working today.



The YCNN believes that the 'Class of 2012' destination data further strengthens the evidence base that the Youth Connections programme is highly effective at working with disengaged young people who present with multiple and complex non vocational barriers. The vulnerability and 'risk' to this cohort cannot be over-emphasised.

Despite the complexity of barriers and issues that many young people present with when entering the Youth Connections programme, the programme has been remarkably successful at engaging and activating disengaged young people. Although not originally a main goal of the programme; local Youth Connections providers have been highly successful at assisting young people into sustained employment, particularly career pathway employment such as apprenticeships and traineeships.

#### ***Brandon – Re-engaged in Education, Then Into Employment in Remote Australia***

Brandon commenced on Youth Connections in October 2012 after multiple issues within his family including the long term illness of a family member which was affecting his engagement at school. Youth Connections supported Brandon to engage with school including a Certificate 1 course and how this may assist him in the longer term to access further education or training. Brandon commenced work experience and made the decision to leave school and move into employment. Brandon's increased his personal and emotional wellbeing. Brandon is now involved in his local community and sporting activities including training in the bush fire brigade. Today Brandon works approximately 45 hours per week. Reports received from his employer are extremely positive.

Brandon thoroughly enjoys working and that in the longer term hopes to gain an apprenticeship and become a qualified boilermaker. He is looking forward to obtaining his licence in the next couple of months, which will assist with his employment. He has a car that he is working on.... when he gets the chance!



The YCNN believes that our success rate in assisting Youth Connections young people into employment options can be attributed to a number of key factors in the design of the programme:

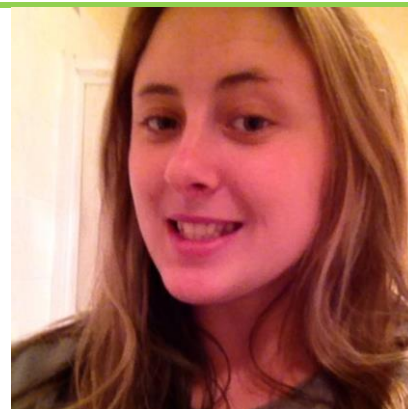
- The relationship based style of case management allows the client and youth worker to work together to design a pathway for the young person that mutually identifies and addresses barriers as well as setting goals;
- The local delivery of the programme by providers in the community leverages off the local knowledge imbedded relationships many providers have with local industry in their region. Therefore, education and employment training opportunities are relevant to the young person's local community;
- The ability to provide follow up assistance to the young person while they are transitioning into employment.

***Haley – Completed Year 12, Working & Further Study Planned***

Haley was referred to Youth Connections by her school. Haley presented with geographical isolation, significant trauma history and multiple family barriers; leading to unstable living arrangements.

Haley participated in Youth Connections and was supported throughout her Year 12 VCE studies. During this time Hayley transitioned into independent living, became involved in her community through sport and successfully gained her Year 12 VCE.

Haley is an inspiring example of how successful Youth Connections can be in supporting young people to achieve Year 12 attainment through empowerment and promoting resilience.



"Youth Connections helped me to get where I'm today. They helped me get through a difficult time at home and also helped me develop more confidence in myself to reach my full potential. Most importantly they got me through my year 12 VCE when I didn't even think I would. Since passing my year 12 VCE, I decided to stay where I worked at Foodworks and the Country Cafe to earn some money.

I have since moved and have enrolled with TAFE for 2014 to undertake my Certificate III in Children's Services. I also plan to keep my part time job to supplement my income and learning opportunities. In the future I aspire to become a fully qualified primary school teacher by continuing my studies to university. If it wasn't for Youth Connections I don't think I would be here today to pursue my dreams so I would like to say thank you."

Australia's most vulnerable and at risk young people, and the Australian community as a whole, faces a most precarious situation. Youth unemployment nationally is currently 12.2%. We know that in some areas of Australia, particularly in low socio economic areas, youth unemployment is as high as 20%.<sup>(1)</sup>

We know that there are approximately 360,000 young Australians under the age of 24 who are inactive (not in full time education or employment) and a further 310,000 young people who are under-employed<sup>(2)</sup> Worryingly, we know that these two figures are continuing to trend upwards.

Without funding in the Federal Budget anticipated to be delivered in May 2014, the Youth Connections programme is set to end on 31 December 2014. Without future funding this could be the first time in nearly 20 years since such national funding for disadvantaged inactive and disengaged young people hasn't existed.

The economic burden for Australian society and government as a result of youth inactivity and poor transitions is substantial. A national youth activation and transition service such as Youth Connections targeted towards young people not engaged in education, employment or training and who have multiple barriers would contribute to reducing this burden and increasing the productivity of the nation as a whole.

### ***Billal – Achieving His Dreams***

Billal was referred to Youth Connections due to negative behaviour at school including fights and violence. Billal would use his size to intimidate others and didn't have the skills to communicate effectively. Billal had a desire to 'fit in' but was struggling in his current learning environment. One incident involving students from another school resulted in Billal being asked to leave school.

Billal engaged with Youth Connections and built a strong rapport with his worker. Billal actively participated in specific behavioural monitoring, communication and anger regulation workshops which gave him the skills to achieve his learning goals. After this, Billal explored multiple alternative learning options and decided to enrol in the Links to Learning Certificate II Course in Skills to Work and Training.

Billal further matured and established strong bonds with both students and teacher. Billal explained that the support he received from his youth worker was the main reasons he was able to complete his Certificate II course. Billal experiences challenges including how to communicate effectively with girls in his class. Weekly consultations showed that Billal was maturing and an asset in the classroom. After completing the course Billal received help Youth Connections into a plumbing apprenticeship, where he stills works today. Billal is enjoying work and has recently commenced Granville TAFE.



1. Labour force status by Region (SA4), Sex and Age, October 1998 onwards February 2013 - January 2014 Youth Unemployment rate
2. ABS Labour Force Survey data 6291.0.55.003