



Southside Education Centre

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Mr Richard Selth
The Secretary
Standing Committee on Education and Training
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

19.8.02

RE: Parliamentary Inquiry – VET in Schools

Dear Sir,

We are forwarding a submission in response to the request for comments about Vocational Education in schools.

We enclose information about our new school model, Southside Education Centre. Since 1997, we have had considerable success in re-engaging marginalized young people in education. We believe that many traditional High School settings at present contribute to the alienation of young people in our society and that there is a real sense of urgency about changing school culture.

We employed a Vocational Education Co-ordinator in October 2001 and have found that we are now able to inspire young people to plan career pathways and to consider vocational options from as early as year nine. Previously, many of our students did not believe that it was possible for them to ever have a job or a career.

Our School

The Southside Education Centre, was established with wide support from government departments in 1997, to cater for the needs of young people who were not able to access education in traditional schools -most have suffered multiple suspensions or exclusion. These young people find Southside welcoming and most begin to reach educational and personal goals. The Southside Education Centre responds to both personal and academic needs of students. (See appendix 2)

Students at Southside Education Centre suffer from post traumatic stress disorders and anxiety related disorders and depression. They share many of the following characteristics:

- Alienation from families
- Alienation from the mainstream education system
- Victims of sexual and physical abuse
- Poor levels of health and nutrition
- Early involvement with the Juvenile Justice System
- In Care and Protection
- 40% identify as Indigenous
- Homeless young women
- Lack of confidence and self esteem
- Many years of missed schooling due to trauma, abuse and marginalisation.

It is imperative that Government bodies take steps to prevent these vulnerable young people "falling through the cracks" and becoming long term unemployed.

Our Vocational Education Program

In October 2001 a Vocational Education co-ordinator was employed at the Centre. Since then, there has been huge improvement in the acceptance by our young people of the need for further education and training so that their life outcomes will be more positive. We believe that if funds are not available to prepare and train these students for employment while still at High School, they will continue to be on welfare benefits for many years to come.

The majority of the young people at Southside Education Centre do not have supportive family networks, and come from extremely low socio-economic groups. They rarely associate with anybody outside the Centre who is in paid employment. Hence, they are alone in the world with no mentors or family to help them in their endeavours to become responsible, stable and employable citizens.

The program we are running at Southside Education to train these young women and to prepare them for the future "after school" is a long term project. Most of them have never participated in any kind of work experience and very few are "work ready". They have low self esteem, limited work ethics and work attitude, no industry training and they need all the assistance the community can provide to enable a self sustaining, successful future.

The task of encouraging these young women to follow stable pathways is not easy, as there are no *significant adults* in their lives and initial mentoring at a younger age has not been available. Most have no career goals and have not had the opportunity of being informed about possible career pathways. When young people arrive at SEC, they simply do not believe that they would ever have a career or be in receipt of paid employment. Thus, at SEC, we focus on **raising self-esteem** and developing life skills and social competence. We also work on raising literacy and numeracy skills and in furthering their secondary education.

Tracking students who leave school.

Our program continues to provide support for a *Transition* Group who have left the Centre, but are still unemployed, or not engaged in training. This group who moved through the Centre before a Vocational Education Program was available are still not sufficiently trained in the necessary qualities needed to be competitive in the job market.

"No matter which pathway these young people take they will be in need of support in relation to their accommodation, employment, welfare and legal rights and responsibilities, financial planning and personal relationships"

(Holden 1992,pp.36-37). (Quoted in NCVET. Early School Leavers at Risk p.12)

A total of 75 placements (Structured Work Place Learning or TAFE training) have been organized since the project began in November 2001. Assistance has also been provided to 7 young people from our Transition Group in developing Resumes, interview techniques, job search, accessing Courses and acquiring part time employment.

Some of the young people have not completed their placements; however this is expected due to the nature of our clientele, who will need on-going support on their journey to achieving long term, stable employment, and improved quality of life.

Southside Education addresses the risk factors impacting on these young people that limit their changes for successful participation in the community and for economic independence in the following ways:

Indicator of poor employment prospects	Our Response
<p>Limited experience of success in an educational environment</p> <p>Poor literacy and numeracy skills</p> <p>Poor work ethics and work skills</p>	<p>Young people at SEC have their individual educational and personal needs addressed and many of them start to reach academic goals.</p> <p>Literacy and Numeracy skills improve, which provide them with the necessary skills used in the workforce.</p> <p>We teach the subject Cert I in Work Education to all students at the Centre. This Course prepares students for the world of work.</p> <p>Under the CEAP funding, the Voc-Ed co-ordinator trains students in self image, job search, career planning, jobs skills, resumes, application letters, interview techniques, workplace relations, occupational health & safety, community activities, structured workplace learning on-the-job and further training at TAFE. The Co-ordinator also works with other teachers & youth workers at the Centre to integrate work skills & work preparation across all learning areas. Students come to the realization that education is their pathway to employment and economic independence.</p>
<p>Lack of confidence and low self esteem; Lack of hope & expectation.</p> <p>Presence of a victim mentality and an inability to make positive changes.</p>	<p>Students at SEC grow in confidence and self esteem, and respond to being treated with <i>unconditional positive regard</i>.</p> <p>The Centre provides young people with personal resources to help them overcome adversity. These include "<i>social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy & a sense of purpose and future</i>" (p.xi, Educating for Resilience, 2001)</p> <p><u>Young women begin to feel empowered, set</u></p>

	personal goals & career goals and strive to achieve them.
Lack of exposure to further education within the family environment; Lack of knowledge of options.	Under the CEAP funding, the Voc-Ed Coordinator provides intensive exposure to career options to ensure students have developed a short term plan and long term career plan.
Lack of exposure to positive role models. Mentoring	SEC staff, volunteers & visitors from various workplaces and industries form positive role models for the young women. Employers who participate in the Structured Workplace Learning Program also act as mentors. We have commenced a Mentoring Program with the support of prominent & successful women in the community. These role models and mentors assist our students in forming work habits and work ethics.
Homelessness	One of our priorities is to help the young women find and maintain stable accommodation. Without this stability in their life, employment options would be very static.

For young people moving from school to University, there is a structured transition; however, for those moving from school to work there is an absence of structure.

“Unless early interventions are developed specifically for young at risk to ensure some success is achieved in a school setting and that structural transitions exist to work and other study opportunities, the myth that there is a range of post school options available will continue to be empty rhetoric “ –

(Youth Studies Australia, Volume 20, n.2, 2001, p.28)

At present young people at risk are still not finding enough support in traditional school settings to reach vocational goals.

“Only the most capable and mature students would have the capacity to juggle the competing demands of school training and workplace environments while still in their mid teens”

(Youth Studies Australia, Vol.20, n.2, 2001, p.24)

The Vocational Education & Training Co-ordinator at SEC liaises with appropriate employers and work places who are willing to offer support, training and work placements to young people from the Centre/

“Schools need to support, assist and liaise with industry in their role as co-educators”

(Early School Leavers at Risk, ANCVAR, 1999, p.13)

At SEC, all students complete a Certificate in Work Education and participate in Structured Workplace Learning. Many students are also participating in further training at TAFE or with Private Providers, or in TAFE courses delivered on site at the Centre.

Quite often it is necessary to send a Youth Worker or the Voc-Ed Trainer, with the students to TAFE or to the workplace until the student's confidence builds and they are comfortable. Due to lack of confidence and self esteem, our girls may find that attending training in the workplace is formidable. A positive outcome for this program could be that the student has developed the confidence to attend for the full duration of the placement. Without the training provided by this program, the young people may never have the confidence to apply for employment and retain a position.

The Vocational Education Project is central to the program, offered at SEC and indeed, is crucial to its success. For it is only by providing vocational education and training in an on-going and consistent manner to young people *at risk*, linked with other educational and personal support at the Centre, that we will be able to break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage that restricts the life chances of these young Australians. If the Vocational Education Project continues, however, we are confident that we will see many of these young people reach career goals, achieve economic independence and enjoy active citizenship in our community.

With Kind Regards:

Julie Bromley

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REFERENCES

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