

Case Study – Maitland Alternative Learning Group

Key Education, Community, Industry stakeholders from within the NSW Lower Hunter area, which forms part of the Hunter Valley Youth Express (HVYE) contracted Region 28 Partnership Brokerage (PB) area (Maitland, East Maitland, Beresfield, Rutherford and Kurri Kurri townships), came together through Partnership Brokerage activity at commencement of 2010.

Discussions occurred around strategies to support students at risk of disengagement, or who were disengaged from attainment of Year 12 or equivalent minimum education outcome. This followed changed legislation increasing the legal leaving age to 17 years. Impacts affecting school attendance and student engagement that were identified included: enrolled but not attending; attending but disrupting; attending but not engaged; disruption to those who wished to be engaged in learning impacting upon the attainment of other students; teacher stress; attainment not occurring for at-risk students creating or further exacerbating risk factors for a number of students.

Education partners cooperated to utilise collective student numbers and resources to negotiate for and provide wider access to alternative learning and engagement. At this time some funding had been sourced by Maitland PCYC to expand their 'Young Leaders' program which had previously been an after school leadership/sport focussed short program without accreditation. Through Regional DET support, collective resources were brought to the table to strategically maximise engagement, accreditation and outcomes for young people through an expanded, additionally resourced and supported Young Leaders Program. This featured:

- 5 schools working in partnership to lead the way in development of an alternative learning and engagement pathway.
- DET Region support to arrange Board of Studies recognition for Certificate II Community Recreation and linkage to Stage 6 high school recognition.
- Completion of Cert II within 3 terms.
- Timetabling/access to learning in a community setting with RTO status.
- Quality delivery of training by community, youth experienced teacher with support from youth friendly organisation (PCYC).
- Identification and referral to program of 60 at-risk and disengaged youth from 5 school areas including Juvenile Justice clients.
- Interaction with TAFE and disability support expertise for access to other suitable support pathways of study for students.
- Engagement of Youth Connections and Independent Employment Advisers to provide support Case Management to youth identified as requiring support.
- Initial development of student profiling tool to track progress of students, subsequently being utilised across the region with other at-risk groups.
- Mentoring engagement through Men's Shed and Business Professional Women's Groups to provide support to identified students.
- Parental engagement activity through Apprenticeship and Traineeship information, access to expert advice and support, and links to YC parent event.
- Rotary engaged support for on-the-job training for those not able to access VET work placement to enhance industry linkages and workplace connection.
- Engagement with Corporate Partners for Change – industry connection at end of Cert II for students.

Key Success Factors to date have included:

- Strong independent leadership from Community sector - PCYC Maitland/State CEO support
- Shared responsibility taken by partners
- Cooperative and constructive relationships between partner schools/DET region
- Regular meetings with established meeting and communication protocols
- Partner willingness to trial new ideas and strategies
- Partner willingness to engage and commit
- Model developed can be duplicated, and is occurring throughout region with enquires fielded from beyond Hunter Region
- Expertise and commitment provided by trainer
- Profiling of students to support tracking
- Parent engagement
- Mentoring engagement
- Case Management

Areas for improvement/growth as partnership moves into sustainability in 2012 include:

- Closer Case Management links and activity, more effective referral processes and commitment to supporting the program is needed
- Effective time-line and processes that have been trialled can now be established in advance
- Links to supports better time-lined now a cycle has been experienced and can be learned from
- Growth of program to increase supports and outcomes
- Duplication of program elsewhere can be supported through key developer of the program, the Manager Maitland PCYC (supported by PCYC State CEO).