



Ausyouth
Supporting youth development across Australia

'It's The Way That You Do It That Counts'

Case Studies
of Positive
Youth
Development
in Australia

Good Practice: An implementation guide

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Good Practice: An Implementation Guide

April 2003

Ausyouth

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The Duke of Edinburgh's Award in Australia
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FOREWORD

Ausyouth was a national project which provided a range of services to promote, coordinate and facilitate youth development as an approach and practice across Australia. The project was funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. Ausyouth's role was to work with and assist provider organisations to advance understanding of the youth development concept and approach with the aim of broadening the base and expanding the opportunities for young people.

Following the release of *Good Practice in Youth Development, A Framework of Principles – A Discussion Document* in 2001, Ausyouth developed a series of practical resources to assist the development of good practice approaches. These companion pieces enhance and elaborate on earlier work and are designed to assist a range of provider organisations in areas of policy, organisation and programs.

This publication accompanies *Volunteering in Youth Development – Making a Positive Difference* and *Creating the Environment for Youth Development – Positive Healthy and Safe* to provide a suite of practical guides to assist organisations in implementing a youth development approach.



ACRONYMS

ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
CALM	Department of Conservation and Land Management (Western Australia)
CFA	Country Fire Authority
CVA	Conservation Volunteers Australia
JVDP	Junior Volunteer Development Program
PCYC or PCYC NSW	New South Wales Police and Community Youth Clubs
SLSA	Surf Life Saving Australia



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INTRODUCTION

This publication aims to assist in the practical application of the principles of good practice in youth development outlined in the Ausyouth publication *Good Practice in Youth Development – A Framework of Principles (2001)*.

This publication will assist people and organisations that wish to apply, or know more about, the principles of good practice in youth development.

A number of arenas in which youth development occurs are highlighted in the publication. The guide to good practice identifies three key critical environments of **Policy**, **Organisation** and **Program** where the principles of good practice in youth development can be applied. The case studies use examples from across all three environments.

The case studies reflect the range of organisations that have deliberately set out to improve opportunities for young people and their communities. These include community service organisations, whether or not youth development is their core business.

In documenting the various approaches taken it is hoped that organisations can learn from each other. The youth development framework offers a way to strive for better opportunities and improved outcomes for young people and their communities.

The **youth development** approach is outlined in more detail in a following section, as are the principles of good practice. This leads into the case studies themselves.

The case studies provide living examples of good practice in youth development at work. They also display a commitment from the organisations involved to aspire to something better for their organisation and programs and, consequently, for young people. They show how a focus on the strengths of young people and their communities can achieve some significant outcomes.

Because the good practice principles are aspirational, the case studies highlight the cycles of learning that organisations have gone through. Some organisations have successfully considered several principles, while others are addressing one or two and using this as a basis for planning future youth development activities.

The concluding section in this document looks at common themes arising from the case studies and the application of the principles of good practice in youth development.



THE CASE STUDIES

Youth development is undertaken in a broad range of organisations and in many different arenas. The case studies presented in this publication have been chosen to show the diversity of activities, environments and levels in which youth development can occur. They are set in a range of organisations, in different communities and with a diversity of young people.

Ausyouth drew on its advisory structures – the National Provider Reference Group and National Advisory Committee – to make the first approaches for suitable case studies. In addition selected provider organisations who were participants at the 2001 Ausyouth National Research Forum on Youth Development were also approached.

A cross-section of organisation types and program styles were able to participate. Care was taken to have a mix of national, state and locally based organisations and those who have worked with young people as their core business and those who have not.

While a range of organisations have been included they are the 'tip of the iceberg' of the diverse organisations undertaking youth development. They do, however, provide sufficient scope to see how youth development operates in diverse settings.

Each case study organisation provided a response to an initial questionnaire and relevant information about their organisation. Organisations were invited to provide real life examples of some of the principles of good practice in youth development. While they are characterised by their uniqueness, they also tell a story that others in youth development will be able to learn from.

Organisations were asked not to provide a series of 'good news stories' but rather provide a real life account of youth development in progress. The case studies illustrate reflection and learning undertaken in the organisations and programs.

Key staff or volunteers were interviewed as a part of compiling the case studies. In this stage it was very apparent that supportive and principled organisations ensure a level of sustainability of the youth development approach. It was also apparent that the individuals interviewed (and others like them) with their enthusiasm and commitment were, to a large degree, the reason for the success of the various programs and activities.

The case studies are stories of how some organisations and individuals have sought to engage with young people and their communities. They provide a source of information for others who wish to do the same.

Most importantly they provide a resource for others who seek to put the principles of good practice in youth development into action. It is hoped that this can be the basis for better outcomes for young people and their communities across Australia.



WHAT IS YOUTH DEVELOPMENT?

Youth development is about providing all young people with positive experiences and opportunities which enhance their strengths and capabilities and which affirm them as contributors to their communities now and shapers of their own future.

The youth development approach:

- is strengths based;
- is whole person focused;
- builds on positive developmental experiences;
- creates opportunities for learning and skill development;
- values young people's contribution;
- is a 'whole of community' response.

Youth development is an approach that focuses on young people's personal and skill development, their connection with their community and the community's connection with them.

A range of well-known national and international youth and community service organisations and countless smaller groups, with strong local identities and support, use the youth development approach.

The sorts of activities through which young people engage in youth development are many and varied; from **the arts to environmental conservation to emergency services.**



Youth development provider organisations

Many organisations work with or for young people, and many of these have adopted a youth development approach.

In Australia, a number of diverse organisations offer youth development programs and activities. These include:

- voluntary, not-for-profit community-based organisations, some of which have been around for many years (for example, Scouts);
- organisations that involve young people in the provision of voluntary services to the community (for example St John Ambulance, Surf Life Saving Australia and country fire services);
- government supported programs such as the Australian Defence Force Cadets, or the Victorian Youth Development Program (which are reliant on adult volunteers) or local youth advisory councils.

What these organisations have in common are the opportunities they offer to young people to develop their skills and abilities, to build social networks and to make a contribution to their community.

Some of these organisations have a core focus on youth development. Others have core goals that are not about young people per se (such as fire fighting or environmental conservation). Regardless of the organisation's core business, a youth development approach can improve organisational practices and achieve better outcomes for the young people who participate.

Ausyouth has developed the document *Good Practice in Youth Development – A Framework of Principles (2001)* to assist organisations in their work with young people.



Good practice in youth development – a framework of principles

Ausyouth developed the framework of good practice principles following:

- extensive review of and reflection on Australian and international literature about youth development, youth work, community development and community service;
- wide-ranging discussions and workshops with key youth development organisations;
- public forums held around Australia about youth development which included exploration of good practice.

A focus on good practice helps to develop between agencies a shared understanding of purpose, quality outcomes for young people, increased consistency and coherence in practice and a mutual basis for collaboration.

It is the intentional pursuit of the good practice principles that distinguishes youth development from other approaches in working with young people. As Howard Sercombe puts it in case study from the Shire of Laverton: 'Many people attempt to work with young people but it's the way that you do it that counts'.

Overarching principles

Good practice in youth development is characterised by the application of two Overarching principles – empowerment and conscious enterprise.

Empowerment

With the right support, assistance and opportunities, young people can be empowered at an individual level. The learning of a new skill or the removal of a barrier which encourages someone to do something in the community that they were previously unable to accomplish can both be empowering experiences.

Similarly, young people can be empowered as a group, for example a group of young people who, with their combined 'voice', instigate a new program or activity.

The case studies showcased in this publication provide examples of both sorts of empowering experiences.

Conscious enterprise

Conscious enterprise, a term coined by Ausyouth, refers to the deliberate means of pursuing positive outcomes for young people. It means that our processes and activities when working with young people are structured and intentional, rather than left to chance. In essence, youth development is **too important** to be left to chance.

Underpinning Principles

Youth development involves more than just a focus on the young person. Thought and effort must equally be applied to the young person's environment.



Youth development principles can and should be applied in policy organisation and program settings. The fourteen principles are often interrelated. In summary, the principles are:

- strengths based, positive youth development as the foundation for policy and program development;
- participation of young people in all levels of planning and decision making;
- encouraging communities to value and engage young people;
- providing opportunities for service to the community that are meaningful for both young people and the community;
- an experiential model of learning that builds on capabilities and skills while maximising opportunities for fun and recognising age and developmental phases;
- encouraging and respecting choice;
- quality outcomes;
- promotion that is ethical, honest and non-patronising;
- maximising formal and community recognition of learning outcomes;
- an inclusive ethos;
- respecting community voice and identity;
- partnerships;
- recognising the contribution of all stakeholders;
- strengthening the interconnectedness of social networks.

By applying these principles in practice, organisations are striving to achieve better outcomes for young people and their communities.

The case study stories in this publication reflect many of the principles of good practice in youth development. They provide an insight into their practical application and highlight the range of organisations and a broad spectrum of activities where a youth development approach can enhance outcomes for young people.

Good practice in youth development requires commitment to continuous improvement. Not everything works the first time, and a longer-term commitment is required to achieve meaningful outcomes for young people and their communities.

The case studies that follow demonstrate the achievements, learning and successes of a range of organisations that have considered the youth development approach to be central to their work with young people.



CASE STUDIES

1. Planning for growth – an evolutionary approach
2. Disability is no barrier to award program
3. New opportunities in a small town
4. Young people gain voice through local youth council
5. Protection of members is a youth development issue
6. Young people in decision making changes community
7. Changing the organisation for youth development
8. Focusing on strengths
9. A principled approach in Laverton
10. Increasing youth involvement in national affairs
11. Evaluation – a vital ingredient
12. Raising awareness about people with disabilities
13. Indigenous communities take up scouting
14. Network for a national agenda



I. PLANNING FOR GROWTH - AN EVOLUTIONARY APPROACH

The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) in Western Australia's Bush Ranger Program has grown from small beginnings to become a significant program. Planning for such growth has been premised on an approach that is evolutionary but backed by some very solid foundations.

About Conservation and Land Management

Conservation and Land Management (CALM) has the lead responsibility for conserving Western Australia's rich diversity of native plants, animals and natural ecosystems, and many of its unique landscapes.

CALM manages more than 22 million hectares which is 8.5 per cent of the state's land area.

Services provided by CALM include:

- conservation of ecosystems and species;
- management of native plants and animals;
- recovery programs for threatened species of plants and animals;
- prevention of illegal taking of native plants and animals;
- emergency actions, such as rescues of stranded marine mammals.

The CALM Bush Ranger Program is a voluntary program for young Western Australians. It is part of a broader initiative known as Cadets WA, which aims to give all secondary school aged youth the opportunity to participate in personal development training that provides practical life skills; develops leadership, teamwork and initiative skills; and fosters qualities of community responsibility and service.

Planning for growth - an evolutionary approach

Starting a new program can be an exhilarating and, at the same time, a daunting experience. Having a belief in the idea of the program and establishing strong foundations can assist.

CALM Bush Rangers, through Bronwyn Humphreys the State Coordinator, found itself in the position of having a 'clean sheet of paper' to start up a cadet style program.

The program had to fit with CALM's environmental goals and also the aims of the Cadets WA youth development program. This was uncharted territory for CALM as they had previously not embraced youth development as a key feature of their programs.

A number of issues became apparent for the project:

- How can we ensure adequate duty of care?
- How can we enlist adults with the time and resources to facilitate this program?
- What are the key principles the program should be based on?
- How can we try to achieve statewide coverage?
- How can we make it fun and challenging for young people?

In addressing these factors CALM has developed a unique program that has enjoyed great acceptance and growth.



Last year, the CALM Bush Rangers collectively contributed more than 180,000 hours to the study of nature conservation and special projects. From Broome to Albany and Coolgardie to Kalbarri, 1,100 young people across Western Australia are active voluntary participants in nature conservation in conjunction with their local communities.

This is a far cry from the two units of Bush Rangers that were established in the program's inaugural year, 1998.

'I had an empty space to start with – so the program was able to develop from nothing. Now we have about 50 CALM staff involved and 1,100 young people.' Bronwyn Humphreys

When the program commenced CALM had no precedents to follow. The project was started from nothing, with only Bronwyn's own experience and networks to draw upon.

Planning in the early stages focussed on the broad program design and getting approval from CALM for the approach and budget expenditure. 'We spent a lot of time planning things early on,' Bronwyn recalls. 'I was very fortunate to have a manager who allowed me the space to use my educational experience to frame up the program.'

Some of the key ideas in the early planning stages were to have statewide coverage, to have activities accredited, to attract a diversity of young people, and to have CALM embrace youth development as an ethos.

Cadets WA had established programs through schools. The CALM program was assisted by Bronwyn's previous teaching experience. 'With my background,' says Bronwyn, 'we were able to start with two schools that I knew had an interest in the environment and had some committed teachers'.

'The schools have really taken care of all of the risk management issues. They have screened volunteers and have good systems in place to take care of the funding.' Bronwyn Humphreys

In the initial stage two schools were approached to begin the program. Schools were an obvious choice to target as they already had some infrastructure in place, and an awareness of duty of care issues. They were also able to identify adult volunteers and enlist community and teacher support.

A set of manuals was developed that achieved national accreditation. These act as 'scaffolding' to the field work. Each Bush Ranger unit creates an annual plan for its projects. This is done in accordance with criteria set up in the manuals.

Bronwyn as the State Coordinator encourages groups to identify their own approach and projects. 'I see my role as a facilitator, the program development is evolutionary and not fixed by CALM.'

'We haven't done any real advertising – it's all been by word of mouth. Now we have 20 schools on our waiting list.' Bronwyn Humphreys

In the four years the program has operated, the community service projects completed have included harvesting termites for the numbat-breeding program at Perth Zoo, actively engaging in 'dieback' operations, completing mosaic control burns for property and biodiversity management, and compiling photographic essays of a marine park.

Teamwork, leadership and the development of other life skills are an integral feature of the program. Many units have rangers who 'peer teach' the biodiversity message at high schools and local primary schools.

'Within CALM there are now 50 officers involved with Bush Rangers in the regions. It's not seen as "Bronwyn's program" – their energies make it all happen.' Bronwyn Humphreys

Last year, to complete a leadership certificate, 40 Bush Rangers were selected to sail in the inaugural Department of Conservation and Land Management-Leeuwin Ocean Adventure.



The impact of this program for the participants has been positive. Young people from across Western Australia have come together to take part in regional and state Bush Ranger conservation events. Bush Rangers are now meeting 'virtually' on the internet and some are operating their own websites.

CALM Bush Rangers caters for young people with a range of physical and intellectual abilities and from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Bush Rangers are encouraging young new immigrants to take part in diverse conservation activities. One Bush Ranger Unit's instructor has Downs Syndrome and children who are 'at risk' are achieving success in other areas of their lives after joining the Bush Rangers.

'It's great to see young people get so much from the program and with the accreditation some can now see that "hey I'm doing science when I do this".' Bronwyn Humphreys

In the first planning stages consideration had been given to identifying possible accreditation for young people for their involvement in the Bush Rangers. The linkages with this program and the Western Australian curriculum framework were identified and in 2001 a system of accreditation was trialed with one school.

Adult volunteers are critical to the success of the program. One hundred and fifteen unit instructors volunteer at least 120 hours a year under a weekly commitment. An additional 58 community volunteers contribute to the units on a more casual basis for such activities as conservation camps or to instruct on a particular skill such as bushcraft and survival.

'The lynchpin to the whole program is having the adults in the local area who are enthusiastic and experienced enough to get things going.' Bronwyn Humphreys

Expertise is also offered by CALM staff, more than 50 of whom act as program coordinators, conservation camp facilitators or fauna, flora and marine conservation experts. Their significant contribution

has allowed the program to expand to the extent that it now involves young people living in rural and remote communities.

'I've found that I have to let go and allow the groups to come up with their own way of doing things – that seems to work the best.' Bronwyn Humphreys

An important facet of the program is the annual professional development inservice for more than 50 adult instructors. Here instructors were able to network across the state, exchange information, gain information about the function of CALM and associated community groups, and gain practical skills in bush plants and bushcraft survival.

The emphasis on inservicing is to empower Bush Ranger units and communities to plan for and take part in conservation projects with confidence. Given the growth of the program and the range of projects undertaken this approach seems to be working. The focus is on the application of principles rather than on prescribed activities, which is consistent with the overall approach to local initiative and leadership.

This allows new groups to be started more easily and allows for new ideas and ways of doing things to be explored.

'The new groups are great – they are like fresh water into the pond.' Bronwyn Humphreys

CALM Bush Rangers has grown to be a positive conservation and youth development program that provides a meaningful way for young people to offer their services to the community and for the community to reciprocate by recognising, valuing, supporting and encouraging them.



2 . DISABILITY IS NO BARRIER TO AWARD PROGRAM

Having a vision impairment could be a major barrier to engaging in an award program. However, with the support of a high school and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award in South Australia, one young man with this disability has been able to travel extensively and complete his Gold Award. This shows how an inclusive approach and practical supports can assist young people with disabilities to achieve some remarkable things.

About The Duke of Edinburgh's Award

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (Young Australian Challenge) is a part of an international 'leadership in action' program, available to all young people aged between 14 and 25.

The award program is voluntary, flexible, non-competitive, balanced, progressive, challenging and most of all enjoyable. It has three award levels of bronze, silver and gold.

It provides opportunities for young people to achieve personal excellence and build self-esteem, self-confidence, self-reliance, self-motivation and respect for others via their involvement in a range of activities.

In South Australia more than 3,500 young people are currently participating in the program. While the award staff can support young people directly, more than 150 organisations utilise partnerships with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award program to enhance their own work.

Disability Is No Barrier to Award Program

To actively support young people, and particularly those with disabilities, requires thought and commitment. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award in South Australia has shown this commitment and demonstrates the principles of an inclusive ethos in its work.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award is an international program that encourages and recognises young people aged 14 to 25 years to strive to reach their full potential through undertaking a variety of voluntary and challenging activities.

Young people are supported in their Award program through local community organisations such as schools, youth groups and youth service providers. The participants choose activities and set personal goals consistent with their abilities, interests and resources in four sections: Skills; Physical Recreation; Community Service and Adventurous Project.

The Award scheme is non – competitive, available to all and is delivered in a flexible manner. Its focus on access and equity has enabled many young people with disabilities to participate and achieve significant outcomes.

Darryl's story, showing his ability to pursue his Gold Award with great humour and sense of adventure, is a case in point.



All Duke of Edinburgh's Awards are special but Darryl's Award is a bit extra. Darryl's expedition to complete his Gold Award is a little unusual. Those who have experienced the Award know that for the expedition component most young people go on some form of wilderness bushwalk, mountain bike ride or canoeing trip. If these types of trips are the norm, how can you possibly count a 14 - day South Pacific, P & O Cruise and a 21 Day Bus tour around New Zealand as part of your Award?

For Darryl these trips were significant, life changing activities.

Darryl is slowly going blind. Over the last few years, his sight has progressively degenerated to the point where he now has only 5% vision. What is common place for those with full eyesight can be a major challenge for Darryl.

'The hardest part about doing my Award wasn't the activities, but filling in the log book. Once we worked out I could provide a verbal report through cassette tapes things became a lot easier.' Darryl

While other young people are experiencing the challenges of the wilderness, Darryl was trying to find his allocated bed - but in a different cabin every night.

Just finding the bus, getting a seat or locating and picking up his luggage from the side of the road was a full-on adventure. Darryl explains that 'just getting through customs, catching connecting flights and navigating the airports was a major exercise.'

Darryl's award program was individually devised around his abilities and interests. The degree of challenge involved came not from a prescribed formula, but from his own experiences, interests and potential.

Darryl demonstrated the value to young people of being able to develop their own program and of being able to do so in an environment of flexibility

and support. He was able to build on his strengths and capabilities and, through the award, expand his influence and control over events in his life. Flexibility in the practical aspects of the award was important to Darryl.

'During the bronze award I received a lot of assistance; at the silver level I only needed a little to do it independently. It was a time of transition, with me being gradually able to take on larger challenges.' Darryl

This opportunity would have not been available to Darryl if the organisation and Darryl himself had not made conscious and purposeful decisions about how best to approach the award commitments. Supporting young people with a disability is not unusual for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Many other young people, some of whom have far more impeding disabilities than Darryl, are able to earn the deserved recognition through pursuit of an award.

The award program has not rested on its laurels. Its organisers are keen to continuously improve their knowledge, experience and processes in working effectively with young people who have a disability.

The award staff recognise that, despite their best efforts, some young people are unintentionally excluded from the program. They either believe they may not be able to complete the award or have not had access to sufficient information. The staff have reflected on the program's inclusive practices and are seeking now to improve community profile mapping and address barriers to entry for young people with disabilities.

'Awards are earned and not won and are based on personal improvement and meeting the minimum time requirements.' Geoff Barber, Duke of Edinburgh's Award, South Australian Division.

Clearer public statements about inclusiveness, increased generic training for host organisations



about equity issues, and improved monitoring and evaluation of unintentionally excluded groups are some of the changes that will assist young people with disabilities to take part in the award.

The involvement of young people with disabilities in the award program demonstrates some real strengths. Most obviously it builds the confidence of the particular young person, but it also serves to break down the barriers between groups, involving young people with a disability in a program alongside their peers.

'I think that we learn more from young people like Darryl than they do from us.' Geoff Barber.

For the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, supporting young people like Darryl is not a side line to their program. The commitment to working and engaging with young people with a disability is fundamental to the program and something the organisation strives to constantly improve.



3. NEW OPPORTUNITIES IN A SMALL TOWN

A few years ago, in an attempt to open up opportunities for young people who are less inclined to play sport, York District High School decided to begin an Emergency Services Cadet Corps under the Cadets WA banner. The cadet unit now attracts the majority of the school population and the local community has come to appreciate its young people far more.

About York District High School

Located in the Avon Valley 97 kilometres east of Perth, York is home to about 3,000 people.

The town is famous for its historic standing, having preserved many of its older buildings. York is the oldest inland town in Western Australia and is heritage listed.

A popular tourist town, York is also famous for its motor museum and a range of festivals.

The York District High School provides education from kindergarten to Year 10. Post compulsory studies must be taken at nearby Northam or in Perth.

The Emergency Services Cadet Corps is a part of the Cadets WA program. In part it aims to:

- strengthen the links between schools, the community and the local emergency service agencies;
- develop the values of duty, loyalty and service to the community;
- encourage young people to acquire skills and knowledge about emergency services.

New Opportunities in a Small Town

Growing up as a young person in a smaller community can have tremendous advantages. There are closer ties with the rest of the community and therefore greater chances for support.

The disadvantage is that often there are limited opportunities to take part in a diverse range of activities. It also means that there are fewer people to share the range of emergency service voluntary positions that need to be filled.

The historic town of York in Western Australia has a population of around 3000 people. This means that the local district high school only provides schooling up to Year 10. After this time students must commute to nearby Northam to complete their studies.

While young people in York have many opportunities, most involve sport. The York District High School wanted to provide more and different opportunities for its students.

In 1998 the school began its Emergency Services Cadet Corps under the Cadets WA program. In a relatively short period of time the cadets have established themselves as a vital part of the community, having contributed to many community events and undertaken a range of useful and vital training.



When a school program enjoys over 90 per cent participation you know the students see it as successful. This is the percentage of students at the York District High School who take part in the Emergency Services Cadet program. According to Bill Wagner, the Acting Principal of the school, 'The program has been a roaring success. It has most of the high school students involved, including our Aboriginal students, as well as a number of staff and community members'.

'The whole school was involved in starting the cadets. We spoke with teachers, parents, the students and a host of people in the community before we started up.' Bill Wagner

'Over the four and a half years the program has been running,' says Bill, 'we have had minimal drop out. I think that from about 400 students who have been in the program only about 10 have pulled out'.

As its name suggests, the focus of the program is on the young people learning about and being involved in emergency service activities.

For example, a local ambulance officer ran a six-week first aid training course for the students. The course included a role-played first aid emergency run by the ambulance service which involved attending to a 'patient' who had suffered a broken leg in the playground.

Other activities that have regularly featured in the program have been communications training conducted by the local police, a police inspector (who used to be the drill sergeant at the police academy) instructing in parade drill, and the local state emergency service involved in training the cadets in a range of emergency situations.

'The town would give us flak, as would the young people, if we ever wanted to stop the cadets'. Bill Wagner

'One of the really good practical things we do is to get the local shire ranger to teach bushfire prevention and control', says Bill. 'This culminates in a real burn off of the school's paddock under the watchful eyes of the members of the local bush fire brigade. The cadets receive a Bush Fire Awareness Certificate at the end of the programme.'

Camping also features in the cadets' program. Camps are structured in terms of terrain, distance, and activities offered. The Year 8 cadets have an induction camp at Rottneest Island over three days, while the Year 10 camp ventures to the Pilbara region in the state's north west for a 10-day adventure.

'The idea', says Bill, 'is to open their eyes a bit about what a state like Western Australia has to offer. It gets them out of the comfort zone of home for a while and provides a challenging setting in which to practice the skills and further develop the qualities instilled in them at school'.

'We do a lot of problem solving. For example, the local swimming pool becomes a crocodile infested river and the cadets have to get an injured person from one side to the other and after treating the injury.' Bill Wagner

One of the most significant aspects of the program is the opportunities for community service offered to the cadets. Participation in the town's Anzac Day service is a highlight. The cadets perform ceremonial duties and assist with flag raising and wreath laying.

As Bill puts it, 'I have a great sense of pride in seeing these young people participate in the community events. When you see someone, who at school you might think of as self centred and non caring, participate enthusiastically in events such as the town and school's Anzac Day ceremonies, you see them in a new light as well as seeing what giving them responsibility can do.'

The local community sees this too. Once a year the Shire of York holds a Seniors Day which involves preparing and serving morning tea and lunch to



some 160 senior citizens from the district. The cadets assist throughout the day by talking to the seniors, serving as waiters and assisting in the preparation of the meals and kitchen duties.

'The best thing about this program is that it gives a positive image of young people – and they deserve it.' Bill Wagner

'The young people realise they live in and are a valuable part of a community; they have an important and valuable contribution to make.'
Bill Wagner

Bill points out, 'We get a lot of comments on the day like "aren't these kids fantastic, so polite, obliging and helpful", it's a much different image of youth than the constant negative portrayal of them in our media.'

By focusing on what young people can do and providing opportunities to build on their strengths, real changes in perceptions of young people occur.

In this way the school is becoming a vital part of the community. 'We don't want to be "stuck on the edge of town"', says Bill. 'We want to be involved with the community and our Cadet program is a great way to do this.'

'The students are involved informally and formally in decisions about the program', Bill explains. 'We might have a chat to someone on the verandah about what we should be doing, but we also have a once a week meeting at lunchtime with some of the cadet leaders about the program.'

Cadet leaders are normally those Year 10 students that are able to assist some of the younger students in the activities. 'One of the strengths we have with our cadet program', says Bill, 'is that we run the entire program on Friday afternoon in school time. This means that all of the cadets are together for some of the time and this helps to create a sense of belonging to something bigger - our cadet unit'.

With the keen interest of the students and the strong support from the community and other groups the cadet program in York is well placed to be a vibrant and dynamic program well into the future.



4. YOUNG PEOPLE GAIN VOICE THROUGH YOUTH LOCAL COUNCIL

The YMCA in Victoria had been concerned that young people did not have enough opportunities to convey thoughts, opinions and ideas to their local councils. Taking some lessons from the experience of running the State Youth Parliament for the past 16 years they established the Youth Local Council program at a local government level to improve the channels of communication.

About the Victorian Council of YMCAs

The Victorian Council of YMCAs is a dynamic movement, bound by a common mission and commitment to community development.

With the organisation celebrating its 150th year in 2003, YMCAs are well established and now operate at over 100 sites throughout Victoria. They have 295,000 people (60 per cent women) of all ages participating in a wide range of programs and services each week.

Their core services are community recreation and sport; juvenile justice; camping and outdoor adventure; accommodation; employment and training; and youth and family services.

More than 4,500 staff (permanent and casual) and 1,500 volunteers assist in delivering YMCA programs and services.

The Youth and Family Services Unit is directly focused on the YMCA's historical mission – the provision of services to young people, particularly those in greatest need.

The unit manages state council projects, supports youth and family services programs throughout the state, advises local associations and service units and, develops new programs and projects.

Young people gain voice through Youth Local Council

Opportunities for young people to convey their thoughts and hopes to governments are few and far between.

Very often young people are only included in decision making in a defacto way or by proxies such as youth workers, teachers and parents.

The YMCA had found that, when given the opportunities, young people provide a unique perspective on community issues. With support, they will participate seriously and with great maturity.

Having worked in about 100 local communities the YMCA of Victoria wanted to provide greater opportunities. They had operated a successful State Youth Parliament program for many years and thought that an adaptation of this program may assist local councils.

Local government in Victoria has embraced the YMCA as a partner in many aspects of community services delivery. The logical extension of this partnership was to work with the YMCA in the design of a youth participation program that would engage young people in decision making in the council structures.

With the knowledge and personnel gained through many years of running programs for and with young people, a new program was designed and has now operated in several communities.



The Victorian Council of YMCAs saw that they had a gap in their service provision for young people. Opportunities for 'youth voice' where young people could express their opinions and put forward ideas to government existed at the state and national levels but sometimes not at the local level.

The YMCA Youth Local Council project therefore was developed to be a 'sister program' to the National Youth Roundtable program, and the YMCA's State Youth Parliament programs. Initially developed as a partnership with the City of Melbourne, the program has become a model that has now been implemented in several other council areas.

'We wanted to have young people utilise the adult versions of decision making – so they would learn how this is done – we used the same debate processes and the same venues as the full council would use.' Peter Newling

Peter Newling the Manager, Youth and Family Services for the Victorian Council of YMCAs is enthusiastic about the new program. 'It has allowed young people to develop a vision for their local community through a process driven by the young people', he says, 'and then look at some practical steps to take in achieving this'.

Volunteers run this program in a three-day non-residential setting. This allows time to consider key community issues and train about 25 young people in the processes of local government.

Variations of the program have included an intensive one-day forum conducted for about 120 participants and establishing an ongoing youth council which runs as an off-shoot to the elected council. The visioning process is a consistent segment in each variant.

The commitment and contribution made by young people has been impressive.

'If anyone believes young people don't have a social conscience they are kidding themselves. The way they have tackled critical issues has been fantastic.' Peter Newling

The Youth Local Council program is consistent with the YMCAs central philosophy that its programs are developed and run for young people, by young people. 'Young volunteers are an integral part of the program design and delivery', says Peter.

While the primary objectives of the project are to provide youth opinion to local council and increase the participant's understanding of how the local government system works it also develops self-confidence, leadership and social skills.

'The project has been great for engendering social responsibility in the participants and altering the community's perception of young people', says Peter. 'In this way it contributes to the social capital of the community.'

'We have found that councils are really keen to listen to what young people have to say. They have asked young people to consider some serious community issues.' Peter Newling

Councils and the YMCA both contribute to the program. Goodwill between the partners keeps costs lower and allows each organisation to focus on its strengths.

This program is far more intricate than being merely an outsourced local government youth service. It involves the commitment of the staff of both organisations (the YMCA and the local council) in marketing, administration, and recruitment; and supporting the volunteers in planning and evaluation.

'The awe which the young people show from being in the council chambers and having council take their opinions seriously is astonishing.' Peter Newling



The councils have been the greatest source of information about agencies working with young people for the YMCA to utilise.

'Although attracting participants has proved relatively simple with invitations going to schools and youth service providers', Peter points out, 'finding young people not in the school system has proved the trickiest and we are always looking for better ways to get a broader range of people involved'.

Issues considered by the YMCA Youth Local Council program have included both youth specific issues and broader community issues that affect young people.

'Although the YMCA gets little recognition for this program, it fits well with our traditional mission and helps increase young people's involvement with their communities.' Peter Newling

Having now run this program in its various forms in several communities, the YMCA has its sights set higher. 'We are looking to run a statewide local youth issues forum in 2003, our 150th anniversary year', Peter says. 'Getting young people from five metropolitan and five rural council areas all together at the one time would be the next stage of this program.'

Local issues for young people may be different in these areas, but the desire to be involved and have a voice remains the same. It is up to communities and organisations like the YMCA to provide the opportunities.



5. PROTECTION OF MEMBERS IS A YOUTH DEVELOPMENT ISSUE

Australian society is becoming increasingly aware of the possibility of abuse of young people. To ensure that its members were protected, Surf Life Saving Australia looked at what other organisations were doing, reviewed their own relevant policies and procedures, changed training programs and created an awareness of the importance of this issue. Now their approach is considered a model of good practice by other organisations.

About Surf Life Saving Australia

Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) is Australia's peak water safety and rescue authority. As one of the largest volunteer organisations in the world SLSA has over 100,000 members with more than one-third of these being juniors.

SLSA provides patrol services on most of Australia's populated beaches in the swimming season. Surf patrols set up the red and yellow flags which mark the safety area for swimming on Australian beaches.

In addition to the traditional beach patrols, SLSA runs community and school education programs; helicopter and jet and offshore rescue boat services; a radio communications network; a medical research program; and database of geographical conditions, wave action and hazard rating on all beaches in Australia.

SLSA is active in surf education and offers the Surf Ed curriculum to Australian schools.

SLSA also provides professional lifeguarding services, contracted to local council or resort operators.

Protection of Members is a Youth Development Issue

Young people are particularly vulnerable to abuse by others.

Figures from the Australian Institute of Family Studies indicates that around 11.2 per cent of young people under the age of 18 are formally notified to the authorities as possible victims of sexual abuse. In the financial year 1998–99 there were 103,980 notifications of child abuse nationally.

For the victims abuse is both frightening and disempowering. Anything that can limit opportunities for abuse or assist with supporting victims is an empowering process.

The SLSA saw itself as a potential target for perpetrators. As they saw it:

- surf life saving is potentially the 'supermarket' of victims;
- surf life savers are overly trusting of other members;
- there is an 'organisational culture' of traditional 'Australian mateship';
- the association was extremely soft in the way they dealt with suspected abuse;
- they were reluctant to admit that abuse (particularly child sexual abuse) occurs in their organisation.

Nothing short of total changes in organisational culture in regard to abuse would adequately protect the organisation and its younger members. Accepting that this was the case, the SLSA set about radically changing policy and practice.



'Swim between the flags' is an Australian catch cry indicative of SLSA's focus on safety. It should come as no great surprise then that this association should take the safety of its own junior members just as seriously.

'If you're not sticking your head in the sand you'd realise that abuse could occur in the SLSA or any other youth organisation.' Danya Hodgetts, SLSA

A realistic assessment of the possibilities of physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse occurring in the SLSA was the catalyst for sweeping changes.

Rick Wright, the Director of Development and Danya Hodgetts, the National Development Manger at SLSA have been responsible for the formulation and implementation of a Member Protection Policy which is now starting to have an effect on local Surf Life Saving clubs.

'It will be accepted as normal principles and values, not a hard sell. We've pushed from the grass roots levels – pushing it up not pushing it down.' Rick Wright

'We were fortunate to have some people involved in SLSA who were well qualified to help develop this policy', says Rick. 'We had a school principal, a former state government minister who had portfolio experience in the child protection area and a child protection officer from a state police service.'

Based on this knowledge and experience, SLSA sought further advice from other youth development organisations. What they found is that a policy like this should not only target the more difficult situations like paedophiles infiltration of the organisation but should also target behaviour such as harassment.

The policy was the starting point for a comprehensive change in how the SLSA views and responds to behaviour that is abusive, threatening or inappropriate.

The policy outlines the rights and responsibilities of youth members and adult volunteers. Please see table below.

	Rights	Responsibilities
YOUTH MEMBERS	<p>Youth Members have the right to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be safe; • be listened to; • be respected; • privacy; • take calculated risks in a protective environment; • an inclusive environment; • be referred to professional help if needed; • be protected from abuse by other members or outside sources. 	<p>Youth members are responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • showing respect to other youth members and SLSA leaders; • keeping themselves safe; • accurately reporting inappropriate behaviour or risky situations for youth members.
SLSA LEADERS	<p>SLSA leaders have the right to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • access to ongoing training and information on all aspects of leading/managing surf life saving activities, particularly for youths; • member protection; • support in the reporting of suspected abuse; • access to professional support services; • fair and equitable treatment by SLSA according to SLSA regulations and policies; • protection from abuse by youths, other adult members and parents. 	<p>SLSA leaders are responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fostering team work to ensure the safety of youth members in their care; • using appropriate team management behaviour; • responding to youth members' statements/concerns about alleged abuse; • ensuring the rights and responsibilities of youth members are enforced; • reporting suspected abuse to the appropriate SLSA authority; • not abusing members physically, emotionally or sexually.



In articulating these rights and responsibilities the SLSA publicly shows the standards it expects from members and leaders. This has been and still is challenging for some. 'Some people aren't comfortable with this policy, but it is for the benefit of our youth members and the SLSA as a whole', says Danya.

The policy change has been backed up by changes to the way SLSA approaches several aspects of its work.

For example, reporting of abuse or potential abuse is encouraged as a part of the policy. In practice this has seen changes in the way that development camps for those 15 to 17 year old members are run.

'Kids are more aware of it – their rights – and they should expect that if they report something it will be fixed. We want to empower these kids by encouraging them to report incidents.' Rick Wright

At these national events a qualified instructor gives the youth members an awareness raising presentation on abuse. This is then addressed in some detail so they are clear about their rights and responsibilities and what to do if they want to report an incident.

Other changes have seen the introduction of more rigorous screening of volunteers. Whereas volunteer leaders have previously been automatically promoted 'out of the ranks' of SLSA members, they are now required to participate in the same screening process as newly recruited volunteers from off the street.

'Awareness raising is key to empowering young people to contribute to the SLSA and their communities.' Rick Wright

Likewise officials at carnivals have to undergo accreditation which in part considers their suitability to be with youth members. As Rick puts it, 'You don't get on the beach unless you are accredited.'

There have been changes to the training courses for coaches and officials to include information about abuse. In-service training for existing coaches and officials has also been introduced.

Both Rick and Danya acknowledge that the full impact of the Member Protection Policy and the changes that go with it are hard to measure. According to Danya 'It may be 10 to 15 years before we know the full impact of the policy. It could be a delayed effect with less cases of abuse being reported in 10 years from incidents that happen today.'

There has been interest from a number of youth and service organisations in the new policy. Many consider the policy to be a positive move which could be replicated in other organisations.

New processes to protect members from abuse are always being sought. Continuous improvement through regular reviews of the policy and its implementation is a key to ensuring that youth members will be able to enjoy their activities free from abuse, and can turn to the SLSA if they require support.

'Young people appreciate the effort and privately some have taken up issues of abuse with members in SLSA when others in the community don't offer them support.' Rick Wright

The lessons in this for young people go far beyond what might be expected from being involved in surf life saving. As Rick says 'We are not only trying to make great life savers we are also trying to make great Australians.'



6. YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION MAKING CHANGES COMMUNITY

Dunolly Country Fire Authority (CFA) Brigade wanted to improve its Junior Brigade. With assistance from the state CFA Junior Volunteer Development Program they began to involve the young members more and more in decision making. The result has seen young people take on new community service opportunities, win a prestigious award and gain new respect in the community.

About the Country Fire Authority

As a community service organisation, Country Fire Authority (CFA) brigades are strongly supported by their local communities. The ties between CFA and state government, local government, industry and brigades are essential to its successful operation.

CFA has now evolved to become one of the world's largest volunteer based emergency services. There are currently 1,218 CFA brigades, and 63,000 volunteers servicing the operational areas throughout regional Victoria and outer metropolitan Melbourne.

The CFA has been running junior brigades across Victoria for over 50 years. In 2000 the Victorian State Government funded CFA to work on special projects with a portion of this money being given to the Junior Volunteer Development Program (JVDP).

It is the aim of the JVDP to give young people in the community the opportunity to belong, learn essential skills, have fun, develop through teamwork, and engage in community development activities. The program provides local brigades with financial assistance, training support, and a higher profile for their junior brigades.

Young People in decision making changes community

What impact could a discussion about youth development principles **really** have?

The CFA's JVDP was set up to assist brigades to provide greater opportunities for young people. To help do this the program's coordinator, Sherri McKerley, had undertaken extensive discussion and consultation with over 200 junior brigade leaders.

Leaders raised a number of questions about their current juniors programs.

- What types of activities can we do?
- What sorts of things would be fun?
- What are young people capable of?
- How do you get kids interested in the program?

Leaders also felt frustrated that young people seemed too hard to please, and were easily bored or couldn't decide what they wanted to do.

Talking about applying youth development principles like empowerment and participation, respecting community voice, providing opportunities for meaningful community service, and achieving quality outcomes seemed difficult to do.

For one small town brigade, however, applying the good practice principles produced some startling results.



Dunolly is a small town of about 500 people that had no high school and no other youth program or organisation. Like many rural towns the local brigade had operated a CFA junior running team for many years, focused on learning about running competitions and fire fighting.

The discussion about youth development came at a time when the leaders had concerns about how the community perceived young people and the range and scale of their programs. They were inspired by the idea of broadening the scope of the junior program and implementing some of the principles of good practice in youth development.

'The leaders loved the idea of the youth development principles. They were looking for something else and it captured what they wanted to do.' Sherri McKerley

The leaders involved young people from the junior brigade in the design of a program that best suited what they were looking for. The brigade held discussions with the young members and encouraged them to bring forward ideas.

The leaders discovered young people wanted a far greater role in serving the community and different activities to be involved in.

Ages in the junior brigade range from 11 to 16 and activities were structured to include all young people at different levels and in different roles based on their experience and ability.

The 15 members of the junior brigade became involved in community activities such as Clean up Australia Day, The Good Friday Appeal, assisting the elderly with changing their smoke detector batteries, and spreading the fire safe message through their school and community.

'It was of great benefit to the young people's self esteem, it served a community purpose (the installation of smoke detectors, park renovation and peer education program) and they demonstrated the ability to decide on how the money was going to be spent.' Sherri McKerley

The community strongly supported what the young people were doing. So much so that members of the brigade and wider community encouraged and assisted the junior brigade to enter in the National Bank's Community Link Volunteer Awards.

The young people held discussions with members of the community and were able to identify one of the town's greatest needs (that they had the capability to address). They also enlisted local people to help them with plans for the renovation and maintenance of a community park.

'Young people wanted to help with CFA activities, to be involved with their community, to have fun, learn new things, go places, make friends and do something worthwhile.' Sherri McKerley

Their proposal was judged the Victorian Emergency Services winner and the Junior Brigade was presented with a cheque for \$5,000. This money is being put towards the park and the construction of a fire education trailer.

The aim of involving young people in decision making was not to win any awards but simply to provide them with positive and meaningful experiences. The award and the park project are just one component.

'This started to improve relationships between young people and the elderly. When addressing the community's poor perception of young people, actions speak louder than words.' Sherri McKerley



For a small town like Dunolly, the award meant a great deal. The National Bank chief executive officer, the mayor, and officials from the CFA all attended the presentation in the town. This made the young people feel like valuable members of the community. The junior brigade members also travelled to Melbourne for other ceremonial activities.

The CFA took pride in the fact that the Dunolly Junior Brigade was the only fire service in Australia to receive a National Bank Community Link Award.

According to Sherri, the activities of the Dunolly junior brigade 'highlighted what Brigades can achieve. It gave the Brigade and its young people great credibility in the community'.

'It also helped other people recognise what youth development is and how it can be applied to an organisation whose core business is fire fighting.' Sherri McKerley

Since winning the award, the junior brigade plan to build a fire education trailer. Designed to teach children about safety in the house, the trailer will be a part of a peer education program that the junior brigade members are undertaking.

The plan is to travel to primary schools and set up the trailer and its attached tent structure. These are then used to offer practical education on safety for children and the importance of crawling low in smoke.

The process of redefining the role of the junior brigade and actively engaging with young people in the community has been a classic win-win situation.

According to Sherri, 'for the junior members it was a way of getting something tangible now. They didn't have to wait to become a fire fighter sometime in the future. The leaders and young members have shown a good understanding of the concept of positive youth development'.

'It was fantastic the way just talking to the young people and supporting their ideas produced so many good things.' Sherri McKerley

So, what impact could a discussion about youth development principles **really** have?

If the junior brigade at Dunolly is any indication, plenty.



7. CHANGING THE ORGANISATION FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

The rapid pace of change is sweeping across the New South Wales Police and Community Youth Clubs. Changes in the style of facilities and management of centres are two significant changes taking place. This will position the organisation at the forefront of youth development and maintain its relevance to young people and communities well into the 21st century.

About Police and Community Youth Clubs

New South Wales Police and Community Youth Clubs (PCYC NSW) is a statewide partnership between young people, the community and the New South Wales police service.

It works to assist young people develop the qualities to be responsible citizens and leaders and to avoid becoming offenders or victims of crime.

PCYC NSW is one of the largest youth organisations in Australia with 57 clubs, 120 police and 400 civilian staff, over 2,500 volunteers, and 50,000 members.

Clubs operate throughout rural, regional and metropolitan New South Wales, and conduct a wide range of programs and activities.

The organisation works in partnership with local government and other youth service providers to find ways to better cater for the needs of young people.

Changing the organisation for youth Development

Following a major review in 1997 PCYC NSW set a new direction that would touch every part of the organisation.

Sweeping changes were proposed to ensure that the organisation was able to keep pace with rapid changes in society and service demands.

According to research conducted by PCYC NSW, young people are seeking more opportunities for real involvement in organisations, and the arts is one avenue to pursue this. Coupled with the need to recognise the changing nature of leisure service provision in recent years this has meant some strategic decisions needed to be taken.

Armed with the review recommendations and some ideas on the future direction of the organisation, strategic decisions were taken about key areas to develop in the future.

Facility and personnel changes have featured high on the list of major initiatives required and the organisation has been working steadily toward these.



Major changes in organisations are difficult and resource intensive processes. Commitments of time and clear processes are important to ensure future development is both achievable and in line with desired goals.

The vision for PCYC NSW is to be a respected and recognised youth service organisation that is dedicated to excellence in youth leadership and youth crime prevention.

Social changes in the way young people use their leisure time, and the reduction in some areas of the number and range of service providers for young people, have meant that PCYC NSW is seeking to change the way it works.

PCYC NSW has sought to adapt to new circumstances through a number of different approaches. Training the 'civilianisation' of its club management is one of these.

'Civilian managers free up regular police to focus on building relationships with young people. This should help to achieve the goal of prevention of youth crime.' Mark Stanton

Mark Stanton, the General Manager Client Services, says that, 'the PCYC is undergoing a significant change process to enhance its effectiveness in delivering positive youth development outcomes'.

Up to now police officers have managed PCYC NSW facilities. The PCYC is trialing the employment of civilian managers in its clubs while maintaining the number of police working in the PCYC. The purpose of the trial is to enhance the opportunities and availability of the PCYC police to work with young people and effectively reduce the levels of youth crime through targeted programming.

Young offenders are one such target group. The intent of working with young repeat offenders is to reduce the incidence of crime and assist young people to avoid becoming victims of crime.

Importantly, the role of the civilian club manager is to implement a diversified community development program aimed at enhancing access for young people to services and decision making processes.

'Facilitating young people's participation in decision making assists in ensuring that the services and programs provided by the organisation will be relevant and continue to be relevant to young people in a changing society.' Mark Stanton

Each club participating in the trial will be evaluated separately against past club performance, and then as part of an overall assessment, in a comparison with all other PCYC clubs. In conducting this evaluation the state office of PCYC will consider a range of criteria.

The evaluation will consider, before and after the trial, differences in attendance numbers; customer satisfaction; the range of programs for young people; fulfilment of the PCYC Charter for Youth; the financial position of the clubs; involvement of young people in decision making; and the number and range of effective partnerships established.

Like the civilianisation trial, the upgrading of facilities under the banner of Pump Youth Space has been a strategy to 'gear up' the organisation for the years ahead.

The model of pump is to develop partnerships with local government and involve young people in the design, development and operation of new facilities.

'The arts were used to engage creatively with young people and involve them in the design and management of these spaces.' Meg Simpson

Meg Simpson, Manager of Cultural Development, says that, in line with current research, the spaces are designed to be 'attractive, appropriate, accessible and affordable for young people'.



At the Tamworth PCYC for example, young people were involved in the development of a television commercial and a visual arts project which set the foundation for their involvement in the final design of the facility. These elements were combined in a workshop with the architects for the project who then worked extensively with young people to arrive at a final design.

'The process allowed us to find out about young people's needs and issues and then develop a space that would meet them.' Meg Simpson

The process has given PCYC NSW a model for the design of facilities, which provides opportunities for young people, artists and architects to combine their strengths. This should ensure that facilities are well placed to meet current and future youth needs.

The combination of the Pump Youth Space project and the civilianisation trial has set PCYC NSW on an exciting journey.

As Mark puts it, 'In some areas the PCYC is the only youth resource in the community. We have to try to make sure they are the best that they can be'.



8. FOCUSING ON STRENGTHS

Young people are over represented in work related accidents and are considered an occupational health and safety risk. This story tells how Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) adopted an approach focusing on young people's strengths to achieve enviable health and safety outcomes.

About Conservation Volunteers Australia

Founded in 1982 in Ballarat, Victoria as the Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers, CVA has grown into Australia's largest practical conservation organisation. CVA involves the community in conservation projects in urban, regional and remote Australia including tree planting; seed collection; endangered species protection; weed control; flora and fauna surveys; walking trail construction; fencing and environmental monitoring.

With a long track record in conservation programs, CVA has frequently engaged with young people as part of their volunteer groups. The Commonwealth Government Green Corps program, however, offered unique challenges.

Green Corps projects typically operate for 26 weeks and involve teams of 10 young people aged between 17 and 20. Funded by the Commonwealth Government, the program is designed to allow young Australians to demonstrate their commitment to the environment by becoming involved in challenging conservation projects. (A consortium of Job Futures and Greening Australia was awarded the three-year contract for the delivery of Green Corps from 2002-2005).

Focusing on Strengths

Four years ago CVA had a challenge. Their national Green Corps program was to engage with about 8,000 young people over four years. Before the program even started, CVA had a host of occupational health, safety and welfare issues to address.

- The young people involved are generally short term, largely unskilled and inexperienced workers.
- Thousands of trainees are aged 17 to 20 – an age demographic over represented in most accident statistics.
- Young people are frequently perceived to challenge direction, compliance and caution.
- The young people involved are generally not conditioned for manual work.
- Labour intensive projects, which may be strenuous, are physically demanding.
- There are more than 100 work sites across Australia every week, with many sites changing from week to week.
- Work sites may be characterised by remoteness, temperature extremes and challenging terrain.
- Projects involve a diverse range of practical tasks and therefore a wide range of risks.

So what did a youth development approach do to increase safety in this environment?

The following case study shows how.



CVA met the challenges well. CVA's Director of Occupational Health and Safety, Garry Snowden, tells how CVA reshaped its supervisor training and made a commitment to engaging young people in processes they might normally be distanced from.

Risk assessment, which focused on utilising the strengths of young people, became the core of training for supervisors and young people. Participants, prior to project commencement, identified hazards and ways to control associated risks.

CVA looked at which of their project groups had the most success in achieving good safety records. They found that those groups who focused on the strengths of young people and worked to engage them in decision making achieved the best results. These groups showed that young people were able to take responsibility and appreciated the challenge of undertaking real work that had community benefit. This approach was then adopted throughout CVA.

'Processes and procedures that empowered young participants worked best. This knowledge helped shape CVA's approach to projects and young people.' Garry Snowden

'We deliberately focused on their strengths', Garry said. 'Some supervisors were authoritarian in what they did. They struck resistance from young people because of this.'

So the challenge for CVA was to give Green Corps participants scope for input into decisions about work site safety within a framework of existing, and often non-negotiable, policies, regulations and codes of practice.

Strategies were developed that would have supervisors train and empower the participants to protect their own safety and that of those working with them.

'A commitment to empowering young people in risk assessment, and having them do real and useful projects has produced very good outcomes.' Garry Snowden

Supervisor training changed to encourage people to consistently look for the strengths in young people, which they may otherwise be inclined to overlook or see as negatives.

Young workers will question work practices that they perceive to be unsafe; they require their supervisors to 'have the answers'. While supervisors were trained to view this positively, the community at large would simply see this as young people challenging direction and authority.

These positive characteristics, when harnessed and developed, assist with the creation and maintenance of a safe working environment.

'If supervisors don't have the answers then the question was probably a good one.' Garry Snowden

Young workers are also seen as a safety management challenge because they are inexperienced and unskilled. The positive side of this is they are willing to learn and have not yet developed habitual unsafe work practices.

The project reached the stage where many of the young people who started as participants went on to undertake training and become supervisors.

On-site supervisors were trained to work with the participants to look over the work site and identify potential hazards. This could include the use of particular pieces of equipment, undulating terrain or extreme temperatures at different times of the day.

'Focusing on strengths and empowerment, makes high standards achievable whereas negative perceptions of youth lead to low expectations of youth capacity.' Garry Snowden



Once hazards were identified, participants worked through possible ways of minimising risks, and set up procedures to ensure safety for themselves and others.

'This becomes commitment and not an "ineffective" statement of rules', Garry said.

So with what seems to be a simple change to procedures that focus on strengths, what are the outcomes? Garry said, 'Green Corps has an average of 1.0 medical treatment cases per six-month project and most of these are precautionary. This is a good result given the nature of the projects.'

'Over a four-year period CVA achieved a 61 per cent reduction in lost time injuries, using a fairly standard industry measure of Lost Time Injury Rate per million hours worked.' Garry Snowden

'This is very pleasing', said Garry, 'given that every ten weeks we lose our best trained and most experienced Green Corps members and replace them with a new group and introduce new tasks and project sites'.

While health and safety processes are one aspect of CVA's work, the individual project environmental outcomes are critical.

Green Corps projects are identified by the community. Projects are developed in partnership with organisations with land management responsibility such as state and local government. The projects are seen as important and they provide experiential learning that is meaningful for young people and their communities.

'Young people are motivated by positive challenge and value the intrinsic rewards of doing well. They care for real projects not artificial 'make work' projects.' Garry Snowden

Mayors, members of parliament and other significant community leaders typically support graduation ceremonies for the individual projects. For young people this shows that the community acknowledges and values them as worthwhile and contributing community members.

'The community gets something tangible done, like the creek being cleaned up, and graduation is the chance for significant people to raise the importance of this. Young people really appreciate this.' Garry Snowden

Over 800 projects of 26 weeks duration were successfully implemented. The Green Corps program has achieved a reputation for positive environmental work, best practice in safety management, and a growing reputation in focusing on the strengths of young people and their communities.



9. A PRINCIPLED APPROACH IN LAVERTON

Laverton is a small remote town in Western Australia, with a high Indigenous youth population with seemingly limited opportunities. The Shire of Laverton wanted to establish relationships with the local community and develop an approach that sees young people take responsibility for their own activities. The adoption of clear key principles for the new Laverton Youth Project is seen as central to achieving outcomes and improving the standing of young people in the community.

About Shire of Laverton- Laverton Youth Project

Laverton is situated on the western edge of the Great Victoria Desert, 360 kms north east of Kalgoorlie, .

With a total area of 179,476 square kms the shire has an estimated resident population of 1,164 people. There are two major goldmines in the Shire of Laverton – Granny Smith (Delta Gold Ltd) and Sunrise Dam (AngloGold Ltd).

The Murrin Murrin project, situated between Leonora and Laverton, is the largest of the new laterite nickel projects in Western Australia.

The pastoral industry which has flourished for over 100 years, still continues with large stations running sheep and cattle.

Opportunities for young people are limited in the town of Laverton and much of the local employment is based at the mine sites where workers often are employed on a 'fly in and fly out' basis.

A principled approach in Laverton

As a remote community Laverton struggles to maintain its level of services to the community over time. Basic services such as medical and educational facilities are limited.

Young people in this community are often not given the same opportunities as those in less remote locations.

The effect of this is that young people can become isolated from their own communities. Schooling is not seen as a priority and post compulsory schooling options are severely limited.

The local community sought and gained funding for the Laverton Youth Project. The project employed a Youth Services Coordinator whose role is to facilitate the development of opportunities and services for young people in the town.

With short term funding the shire through the Youth Services Coordinator has sought out the town's young people and community leaders and begun to engage them in meaningful activities and programs.



Laverton, by any measure is an isolated town. Over 900 kilometres from Perth and with a small population the opportunities for young people are limited. There is a significant population of Indigenous people, predominantly Wongai.

There are 22 students of high school age in the local school. All but two of these are Wongai as most of the non-Indigenous young people go away to boarding school. Only about 70 per cent of those at high school age will attend school on any one day.

'Programs have the best chance of success if they happen from the inside out, bottom-up.'
Howard Sercombe, Youth Services Co-ordinator

The Laverton Youth Project seeks to engage with young people and operates on three major fronts: youth development, community development and service development.

Howard Sercombe, the project's Youth Services Coordinator says, 'The project is strongly informed by participatory action research principles. This has made a real difference to the approach taken with young people and community members'.

The project's core principles are that it is: inclusive, participatory, transparent, accountable, collaborative, professional and research-based. Consistent with this, young people were invited to join the management committee.

The project seeks to increase the capacity of young people to take control of their lives, to connect with their communities, and to find positive roles within them.

'The young people in the management committee had never been to a business type of meeting. So it was all new and interesting. I had to make sure I did a debrief with them afterward.' Howard Sercombe

Recent examples of activities include:

- assisting young people to organise and run their own camps, discos and movie nights, rather than have adults organise such events for them;
- working with parents to organise a trip to the Yeperenye Festival with visits to Alice Springs art galleries to showcase Aboriginal achievement and enterprise and see what Indigenous people are doing elsewhere;
- reconstituting the Youth Advisory Council;
- including two young people in the project's management committee.

'One of the young people wanted to re-establish a Youth Advisory Council. I told her we needed to get some people together for that. By Wednesday afternoon we had a keen group of young people and our first meeting.'
Howard Sercombe

With the support of the project the Youth Advisory Council has organised several discos. The last disco was conducted without Howard being available. 'To my great pleasure', said Howard, 'in my absence they had organised the entire disco including recruiting adult volunteers. By all reports it went well'.

When the approach taken in the project is one based on relationships, opportunities to do new and different things can happen almost spontaneously. After being approached by some young people to visit the circus in Leonora (120 kms away) a quick phone call to the local police to borrow the personnel carrier and the trip was organised.

In return, the young people agreed to try and control the use of shanghais and tell younger children that they shouldn't shoot the streetlights!

A trip to Broome is being planned through the Youth Advisory Council, following the success of trips to Alice Springs and Perth for the annual Skyshow.



Not all programs that are set up will successfully engage young people, despite careful planning and consultation. Time is needed to salvage false starts and re-plan. Action research approaches can maximise value in such circumstances by careful evaluation, analysis, documentation and application to future planning processes.

'It takes time to gain their confidence, to get below the surface, and to be able to assess accurately both their conception of what they need and to push their thinking to consider longer-term questions.' Howard Sercombe

'It is not a job that can be completed quickly', says Howard. 'There are long timelines in establishing the foundations of effective developmental work with young people who disengage from school, work and often family.'

The problem is not just one of effective coordination or greater collaboration. Key services are missing in Laverton, especially in the area of post-secondary education and training. Where new services are called for, it is the coordinator's role to facilitate the development of necessary organisational structures and to secure the necessary financial support.

'Many people attempt to work with young people but it's the way that you do it that counts.' Howard Sercombe

The Youth Project has been involved in:

- facilitating the development of an Aboriginal art gallery/café/interpretive centre in Laverton, including structured workplace based training capacity for training 15 to 18 year olds in café and restaurant work, tourism and administration;
- initiating discussions within the community about the establishment of a senior college or education facility for post-secondary clients.

'We are just starting to see the benefits of the approach we have taken', says Howard. 'It will still take time to really have the community engage with young people and to develop the range of opportunities they should have.'

With the approach taken and the consistent application of explicit principles the project is certainly off to a wonderful start.



10. INCREASING YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN NATIONAL AFFAIRS

National organisations often face the challenge of ensuring adequate representation from states and territories in the running of their affairs. It is often even harder to ensure representation from young people. For the Australian Red Cross young people's involvement at a national level is important and is being actively pursued. The 2001 National Youth Conference encouraged young people to address ways of increasing the number and diversity of young men and women involved in the organisation.

About Australian Red Cross

The Australian Red Cross is part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Its mission in part is to alleviate suffering, protect life, promote health and social welfare and encourage voluntary service.

There are more than 1,100 units/branches, 41,000 financial members and 87,000 volunteers in the Australian Red Cross.

The Youth and Education Services section of Australian Red Cross is taking an active role in the area of youth development. They encourage voluntary service, promote self-esteem and allow young people to participate actively within their community.

This is achieved through national programs, such as Junior Red Cross, Red Cross Community Action in partnership with the Commonwealth Bank, and Red Cross Community Challenge, as well as locally based programs.

The Australian Red Cross has over 18,000 youth members who contribute thousands of hours in voluntary effort to assist those in need in their community.

Increasing youth involvement in national affairs

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is the largest global humanitarian network, with 97 million members and volunteers across the world. The Australian Red Cross is a part of this network and one of its many functions is to actively engage with young people in a meaningful way in the work that it does.

Finding ways to achieve this at a local level can be challenging. At a national level the challenges are far more pronounced. Scale and distance from the grass roots of the organisation provides its own set of problems.

As National Manager, Youth and Education Services, Sue Hubble has the responsibility of looking at the whole of organisation approach to the involvement of young people.

One mechanism Australian Red Cross has developed to provide national level involvement is the running of a National Youth Conference every three years. Given that 2001 was the International Year of Volunteers, it was seen as timely to examine issues surrounding the involvement of young people within Australian Red Cross.



Red Cross has been committed to supporting young people in the organisation for many years. The chair (who must be 25 years or younger) of the Youth and Education Services Advisory Committee sits on the National Executive, which is the peak policy making body of the organisation.

The triennial youth conference is one event that has been used over the last few years to reaffirm this commitment, and is funded by the National Executive.

'The Red Cross is committed to involving young people in the organisation. Holding the conference in difficult economic times is a good example of this commitment.' Sue Hubble

In 2001 the Australian Red Cross, National Youth Conference was held in Adelaide.

The theme of the conference was 'Volunteers – The Power of Humanity'. It was designed not just to highlight the aspects of Red Cross' humanitarian work to young people, but more importantly, to utilise their expertise to develop and recommend strategies for better involving young people in the broader organisation to National Executive.

'The young people basically ripped apart my draft program to come up with the things they wanted to do – it was great to see.' Sue Hubble

The aim was to bring together young people from around Australia to look at issues such as tolerance, international humanitarian law and involving young people in the organisation. Participants were also required to give a brief presentation to a group of local primary school students about Australian Red Cross.

Young people were involved in the conference on a number of levels:

- input into the program design, such as what activities they wanted and identifying areas of interest;

- design of the logo and decision on the T-shirt design;
- use of 18 to 25 year olds as mentors who ran energiser sessions;
- young people wrote the two outcome statements arising from the conference deliberations;
- participants put together and ran the closing ceremony;
- at the closing ceremony participants presented their outcome statements to South Australian executive members;
- two participants presented the outcome statements to National Executive.

'There were a few surprises – the T shirts were designed with the logo in the centre and the conference details on the sleeve – we would never have thought of this and they were a huge success.' Sue Hubble

Participants were young people from around Australia who have been involved in a variety of Australian Red Cross youth development activities in their state or territory. 'We had three young people, one mentor and one staff member from each state and territory attend', explains Sue, 'and many more young people from South Australia, as the host state, were involved in putting the event together'.

They learnt about people from diverse cultures through panel discussions and small group work. They listened to speakers discuss the role of the Red Cross internationally and gained skills for preparing presentations on the Red Cross as well as having the opportunity to put these into action.

'We get the opportunity to build on the enthusiasm and idealism of young people to make it an organisation that young people wish to become part of.' Sue Hubble

'I think for many of the participants this was an eye opening experience as they realised the international scale of Red Cross work', says Sue, 'they also got to better understand issues of diversity and tolerance'.



Mentors who taught the delegates had learnt a few activities they could conduct in relation to what Red Cross does. Participants put into practice what they had learnt when they visited the local primary school. They were then given the opportunity to present these activities to the Year 7 group.

By involving a number of adults in the conference there was an opportunity for them to interact and better understand what young people have to contribute and the issues that are important to them. By going out to the primary school, young people were able to demonstrate their commitment to developing humanitarian values.

'It just showed again to me that we have got some terrific young people in the organisation.' Sue Hubble

'We sometimes underestimate young people', says Sue, 'the outcome statements they arrived at for instance, were quite substantial and surprised some people'.

The participants wrote and presented two outcome statements. The first statement related to young people in the Australian Red Cross:

We, the delegation of the 2001 Australian Red Cross National Youth Conference, believe in the abilities and ideas of youth within Red Cross as an integral part of the organisation. We feel that young people should be nurtured, supported and empowered by Red Cross staff and decision making bodies through specific and relevant programs and services.

The second statement was focused on diversity:

We, the delegation of the 2001 Australian Red Cross National Youth Conference, believe that diversity within our organisation should be embraced and promoted in order to truly reflect the universality and impartiality of Australian Red Cross.'

'The chair of the Western Australian Youth Advisory Committee uses the conference outcomes as a guide.' Sue Hubble

Both statements included specific recommendations and strategies for consideration by the National Executive. In relation to statement one, for example, it was recommended that an image of Australian Red Cross is created and promoted to appeal to young people. It was also recommended that Red Cross actively promote community partnerships with youth focused organisations to assist in the assessment of the needs of vulnerable and at risk youth.

Arising from statement two it was recommended that Red Cross work collaboratively with other community groups to promote education, tolerance and understanding. A strategy to assist with this is the utilisation of past international delegates.

Many of the participants have taken up the challenge to progress the initiatives started at the conference. 'One young woman has become involved in the regional restructure of the organisation', Sue reports. 'She has also sparked interest in her own college in establishing a Red Cross unit there – she has been very active.'

'I think the confirmed that young people have a very valuable role to play in the broader Red Cross organisation.' Sue Hubble

For the National Executive the presentation showcased the enthusiasm, energy, talent, skills and vibrancy of young people within the Australian Red Cross. It helped to show that youth programs and real opportunities for involvement of young people are valuable and something that should continue.



II. EVALUATION – A VITAL INGREDIENT

The *active8* program was set up with high expectations as the Premier's Youth Challenge. From the outset it was thought that evaluation of the program would be a primary consideration. Resources were set aside on an annual basis and systems put in place to allow this to happen. Now, as a more formal evaluation is taking place, the foresight of these decisions is bearing fruit.

About *active8*

The *active8* Premier's Youth Challenge is a South Australian Government initiative aimed at providing young people with challenges, opportunities to develop new skills, and to find the confidence to become actively involved in their local community.

As the name suggests, the program is about action, and building on a spirit of voluntarism, which already has a strong presence in South Australia.

active8 is for young people in Year 8 or above at secondary school, and young people aged 15 to 19 years who are not enrolled in formal education.

active8 programs are developed as partnerships between host organisations (for example, schools) and a service provider (for example, St John).

A local community coordination group manages state government funds for each program. Input from young people is required in deciding on a program that is right for them.

Evaluation – a vital ingredient

When a new program is established expectations are always high. There are hopes that the program will deliver extensive benefits to young people and communities.

When the program is established with some fanfare and described as the Premier's program, such expectations are even greater.

This was the environment in which *active8* was established as a pilot program. To prove the worth of the program critical questions would need to be answered, such as:

- Have expectations been met and were the outcomes appropriate for young people?
- Were the processes adopted the best ones to meet the objectives?
- Was it sufficiently worthwhile to warrant consideration as an ongoing program?
- Most importantly, was the program meeting the needs of young people and the communities in which it operates?

With this in mind, the program established a pool of resources to gain data and evaluate. From day one, the program was set up to answer these questions and it is now reaping the rewards for that early effort.



Evaluation is often seen as the thing you do when formal reports are required at the end of the year or the end of the program. Generally the amount of thought and effort that goes into it is directly related to how close the deadlines for reporting are. This last minute approach to evaluation does not provide the breadth of information required to best understand the effectiveness or efficiency of a program.

When the *active8* program was established a very different approach was taken. Rather than the last minute, evaluation was a first minute consideration.

'We need to find out if the objectives are being met and if the outputs and outcomes are being achieved.' Stephen Blight.

Stephen Blight, Director, South Australian Youth Development Program and Tony Healy, Senior Policy and Program Officer, have been involved from early on in the evaluation processes for *active8*.

'Evaluation data was collected from day one', says Stephen, 'The program has always been upfront about what it is trying to achieve as a pilot project so evaluation is vitally important'.

'The evaluation should show what we've got and where we need to go. It will be the tool we use to reshape the program.' Tony Healy

The program has a number of stakeholders, including young people, service providers (such as Carclew Youth Arts and St John) and host organisations (such as schools and youth organisations).

When devising the program it was important to consider the needs of all of these groups. The Ministerial Council of Young South Australians, Youth Plus, had a major impact on the objectives of the program. They surveyed approximately 400 young people about their thoughts on a youth development program.

The results of this survey indicated a clear desire for a program that went beyond and was more flexible than a more traditional cadets' style program. Drawing on the survey significant changes to the program design were made. 'Youth Plus were very pleased that the changes they had suggested were generally taken up', Stephen said. 'The idea that they could influence a government program to the extent they did was probably unexpected.'

'As the Premier said at the launch of the program, young people have changed the program into something quite different to what was first envisaged.' Stephen Blight

Youth Plus was also important in assisting with the establishment of the *active8* Youth Voice body. This body is drawn from young *active8* participants and provides an advisory role to program design and delivery. 'It is probably fair to say that the Youth Voice group is still establishing its role', Tony pointed out. 'Over time and with support they will have a greater influence over the *active8* program.'

The formal evaluation plan document clearly indicates the importance of youth involvement in *active8* at both local and statewide levels. 'One of our key result areas was to give young people the opportunity to influence decision making', says Tony. 'This means we have a measure of success relating to the establishment of a youth advisory body. I think we are the only state government sponsored youth development program that has a formal mechanism like this.'

The task of running the program, collecting data and setting up evaluation processes falls to the staff team known as the *active8* Taskforce.

'The *active8* Taskforce is very customer focused. Every phone call is taken seriously and followed up. Evaluation is another more formal way of showing this focus.' Stephen Blight



As Stephen puts it, 'We have to be sure we are meeting the needs of young people as much as we are meeting the needs of government, which of course should be hand in glove'.

The final evaluation will be presented to state cabinet. It will also inform the work of service provider and host organisations. Other key stakeholders with an interest in the evaluation are from within and external to government including young people, schools and community organisations.

'As well as providing feedback to the stakeholders we hope that the formal evaluation will confirm some of our thoughts about how well we think the program is going', says Stephen.

While an internal view of the program is important, the *active8* Taskforce wanted to make sure that the evaluation process was as objective as it could be. A formal evaluation process, which would collate current data and information and undertake several new processes, was devised.

'We think the evaluation will clearly show that the preconceptions about the program – that it only services white males who are fairly well off – will be shown to be not based on the facts.'
Stephen Blight

A specialist departmental evaluation unit, the Office of Review, was engaged to assist in the design of the formal evaluation and the analysis of data. 'Getting the expert advice was important', says Tony. 'They provided a framework that was comprehensive yet simple to understand and implement.'

As a part of the evaluation, surveys and focus groups are being conducted with young people, service providers and host organisations. In addition case studies will be collected. This information will be matched with the existing data and analysed by an evaluation reference group.

The reference group is made up of staff from *active8*, related policy and program areas, and the Office of

Review. 'This is going to take some time and fortunately when the program was established funds were earmarked to conduct an evaluation', Tony says. 'We could have put much less into this and simply built on our own conclusions but that is not what is needed.'

'If we are going to do this we should do it properly – really find out if our hunches are right or not.' Tony Healy

The *active8* evaluation has also been informed by a pilot evaluation conducted by the Office of Review in December 2000 of the South Australian Police and the Adelaide High School programs. As with the other *active8* activities, this project had benefited from already established processes.

Comprehensive data collection has taken place throughout the life of the program. Aside from the collection of statistical data, one of the most significant tools used to collect information and support the ongoing development of the program is the moderation visits, where *active8* staff formally meet host organisations and service providers.

The moderation process has been used to recognise and share good practice, monitor projects, advise on successes and areas for improvement and to provide local stakeholders with the opportunity to contribute to the program at a state level.

'We encourage the host organisations to have some young people [program participants] to talk to us in the moderations. They give a unique view of the workings of the program.'
Tony Healy

According to Stephen, 'We take a far more active role in the day to day running of the projects than just being a funding provider. As part of the moderation process we really try to support the service providers and host organisations and develop a strong relationship with them'.



These relationships were important when asking for host organisations and service providers to support the formal evaluation. There was a good return rate from organisations for the type of survey conducted.

This level of interest in the program has *active8* well placed should it continue past the pilot program stage. The learning from the data collected and the process of evaluation itself will inform the future of the program.

The process developed will also assist others as the Office of Review is already using it as a model of good evaluation practice which other public sector programs could adopt.

active8 has demonstrated the ongoing benefits of ensuring that evaluation processes are built in right from the program planning stage.

'From the very first day the culture of *active8* has been one of wanting to best meet the needs of young people and provide the best programs possible. Thorough data collection and evaluation with a view to improving what we do is a feature of this culture.' Stephen Blight



12. RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

People with disabilities are often stigmatised and deliberately or inadvertently excluded from a range of community activities. Scope Vic (Ltd), formerly the Spastic Society of Victoria, has a range of services and programs designed to support people with disabilities and change attitudes and behaviours in the broader community. The Scope Young Ambassadors program, has offered life-changing experiences for some of the participants.

About Scope Vic (Ltd)

Established over 50 years ago, Scope is a non-profit organisation providing statewide services to over 3,500 children and adults with physical and multiple disabilities.

Scope provides:

- accommodation and respite
- adult day activities
- attendant care
- early intervention
- education
- employment and training
- health support
- leisure
- specialist advice
- therapy
- transport

In addition, Scope focuses on research, raising community awareness and facilitating community inclusion for people with physical and multiple disabilities.

Scope Young Ambassadors, run in partnership with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Program and the Victorian Youth Development Program, is targeted at 7 to 25 year olds. It aims to raise awareness about the issues in the community for people with disabilities. Students take part in education and community service with a view to promoting positive attitudes and behaviours.

Raising awareness about people with disabilities

Today more than three million Australians live with some form of disability – about one fifth of our population.

In the past, people with disabilities were treated as being sick and needing constant care. People with disabilities were often totally segregated from the community. Decisions were made for them, including what to eat, drink and wear and where they should live.

While attitudes and behaviour toward people with disabilities have changed over time, still much more needs to be done.

Raising awareness of disability issues increases opportunities for greater accessibility and community integration for people with disabilities.

Scope, in partnership with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Program and the Victorian Youth Development Program, has established a youth development program that is designed to assist in awareness raising.

Operating through schools, the program has enjoyed considerable success. It has provided information and training for the young people involved and for some, significantly expanded their outlook towards people with disabilities. This program provides a model that could lead to change in Australian society.



People with disabilities are excluded from society in a variety of ways. Some barriers to inclusion are generated by a lack of information and awareness, and others result from the attitudes of members of the community.

Physical barriers, such as a lack of ramps in buildings, are compounded by other issues such as the perceptions of people with disabilities. For example it is a common misconception that if a person has a physical disability such as cerebral palsy, or does not have speech, they must also have an intellectual disability.

Scope saw that the people with disabilities who make up its client group could empower young people in the broader community. To do so required young people to have access to awareness education and training, and to be able to utilise new skills and information in a practical setting.

'Unless we change attitudes we won't have inclusive communities. This is the same for Indigenous people as well as people with disabilities, or a whole range of people in the community.' Jenny Gillespie, Scope

The result is Scope Young Ambassadors who aim to:

- create tolerance, understanding and acceptance of others;
- raise awareness and understanding of the lives of people with disabilities;
- enhance leadership skills and encourage young people into a lifetime commitment to volunteering;
- promote a sense of civic responsibility in young people.

Jenny Gillespie, Scope's Community Relations Officer, and Coordinator of Scope Young Ambassadors is very enthusiastic about the program and what it is capable of doing.

'I remember one session; a man with a disability sharing his experiences with some of the school students, that is the most stirring experience of my whole work life.' Jenny Gillespie

'One session is facilitated by a client of Scope who shares his or her experiences as a person with a disability', says Jenny. 'This is very personal and a very powerful message for the students in the program.'

The service component of the program includes three self paced modules. The first two modules are classroom based and focus on 'Understanding disability and diversity' and 'Communicating successfully with others'.

The third module is a practical component entitled 'community service activities' and places students with Scope or another community agency in an area of their work. Students are assisted to develop and plan their own service ideas, with a view that the outcomes will reflect a diverse range of young people and their communities.

'Students get to take part in public speaking, media presentations, sporting and leisure activities with people with disabilities', Jenny points out.

'The communication skills are useful not only in this program but young people can use them throughout their lives, in any new situation and with all sorts of experiences.' Jenny Gillespie

Additional modules in the skills component of the program include three extra modules. These are 'business planning', 'marketing and promoting your product' and a final module entitled 'being a leader'.

The six modules for the service and skills components are to be completed in a minimum period of six months. The service and skills components may be completed separately or concurrently.



'We go and talk to the schools beforehand and we are flexible about how the modules can be delivered', says Jenny. 'In this way we try to meet the needs of the particular school and the community.' A Scope field officer and a school coordinator will work with students and participating schools and organisations to deliver the modules.

Scope has long recognised that creating opportunities for people with disabilities needs a sustained effort to change public attitudes and to educate the entire community. Without community awareness, the talents and aspirations of people with disabilities will often be ignored or overlooked.

Scope views Scope Young Ambassadors as making an important contribution to the development of young people as community minded citizens, while at the same time giving the students useful skills and a sense of achievement that will carry on throughout their lives.

'Scope has funded this program from its own funds. The Board has shown a total commitment to improving community attitudes to people with disabilities.' Jenny Gillespie

Outcomes for students include:

- communication skills;
- organisational skills;
- leadership skills;
- recognition within the school and the broader community;
- experience in public relations, media and cause-related marketing;
- education about issues surrounding disability awareness and discrimination.

Outcomes for people with disabilities include:

- a more inclusive community with greater understanding and tolerance of differences;
- a reduction in direct and indirect discrimination;
- skills development and enhanced confidence for those people with disabilities who assist with the program in schools.

'Some schools have a specific target in mind. They might have a student with a disability who could benefit from awareness raising amongst some of the other students.' Jenny Gillespie

The community also benefits through:

- empowerment of young Australians;
- more effective integration of students with disabilities into schools;
- development of leaders of the future;
- creation of a sense of community responsibility in young Australians;
- disability education;
- people with disabilities playing an active role as program facilitators.

'We can prepare people with training about difference, but until they get the chance to experience it for themselves it really doesn't have the same impact.' Jenny Gillespie

For some students who have participated in the program the impact has been profound.

As one student says, 'I came out with a lot more knowledge of people with disabilities and I learnt that they should be treated as normal'. Another points out that 'It gave me a better insight to the life of people with disabilities and made me realise that they are just the same as me. I had a lot of fun with them. They are really nice people. I don't know what I was nervous about.'



13. INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES TAKE UP SCOUTING

Indigenous people are amongst the most disadvantaged in Australian society. Scouts Australia as one of the largest youth development organisations in Australia is seeking to assist remote Indigenous communities. Through the Scouting in Indigenous Communities Project, Scouts Australia, in partnership with local communities, is striving to blend the traditions of scouting with those of Indigenous communities.

About Scouts Australia

Scouting is a voluntary, multicultural, educational and developmental movement for young people.

The aim of scouting is to encourage the physical, intellectual, social, emotional and spiritual development of young people so that they take a constructive place in society as responsible citizens.

Young males and females can progress through the five scouting sections – Joey Scouts, Cub Scouts, Scouts, Venturer Scouts and Rovers or they can start in any section depending on their ages.

Scouting seeks to help young people:

- **learn** through fun and adventure;
- **develop** new skills and interests;
- **share** with friends their own age;
- **help** others;
- **serve** the community;
- **work** together;
- **enjoy** outdoor life;
- **gain** confidence;
- **accept** responsibility;
- **show** resourcefulness;
- **think** for themselves.

Indigenous communities take up scouting

Young Indigenous people are seen as the future of Indigenous culture, as they represent nearly half of the total Indigenous population.

However Indigenous young people face high levels of disadvantage particularly those living in remote communities. They suffer from higher levels of poverty and social exclusion and low rates of life expectancy.

The youth development approach, with its focus on the whole person and the strengths of young people and their communities, may seem an unlikely approach given this background. However it is because of this background that a youth development approach is appropriate.

In several remote Indigenous communities, however, Scouts Australia is developing partnerships to support youth development programs that are culturally relevant for Indigenous young people.

In a departure from traditional scouting, the scouting in Indigenous Communities Project aims to develop strong Indigenous ownership and link Indigenous cultural life with mainstream scouting.

Through the initiation of the pilot project, Scouts Australia and local Indigenous communities are developing some very interesting approaches to working with young people.



Traditional youth development programs and activities have been in operation for a long time. The focus on building the strengths and capabilities of young people has frequently led to the perception that these activities are the domain of the affluent and privileged.

What the Scouting in Indigenous Communities Project pilot demonstrates is that a strengths based approach has equal value for young people in those communities that are considered to be disadvantaged.

Remote Indigenous Communities are far more likely than most other areas in Australia to suffer from high levels of unemployment and poverty and significant and complex issues such as petrol sniffing, alcohol abuse and drug abuse.

These communities are concerned that their younger members lack opportunities for advancement. Ways of providing these opportunities have often only focused on the community problems and not on the inherent strengths and abilities of these communities and their young people.

Scouts Australia, as a volunteer organisation with international experience, saw that their approach to youth development may provide a way forward. In partnership with the Australian Sports Commission, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), Scouts Australia conducted extensive consultation and deliberations with the local communities.

Bruce Munro, Chief Commissioner of Scouts Australia highlights, the significance of the consultations. Bruce says, 'We started three years ago talking to people and researching what approach we might take across the country. About the same time one of the members of the Hope Vale community attending scouts in Cooktown decided to start a group in Hope Town. This group has been running for over two years now'.

'But now that I've got the scouting I've got both of each side [of a divided community] joining in with the scouting. It sort of bought their fellowship a bit closer, they no longer fight with each other: and it really improved, and it made me happier to see them side by side talking to each other, singing. Joining in with games, laughing together – this is very great.' Philomena Naylor, Hope Vale Scout Leader.

This group provided Scouts Australia with a model they could learn a lot from. They quickly found that the community was keenly interested in the scouting approach with its focus on outdoor activity, experiential learning and small groups.

'I think the principle of the program, the cause of the program and what it stands for really help and uplift the communities where the scouting movement is likely to be established.' Gatjil Djerrkure, ATSIC

What also became apparent is that scouting could assist individual communities and may also help advance the reconciliation agenda. 'I think Scouting in Aboriginal communities is one of the most important initiatives for positive development in remote communities that I've seen in my two and a half years as Deputy Chairman for the Council of Aboriginal Reconciliation', says Sir Gustav Nossell.

The core objective of the program is to develop a culturally specific leadership and community development program for young Indigenous people in isolated communities. It emphasises strong Indigenous ownership, with ever present links to Indigenous and cultural life and mainstream scouting training and activities.

Based on the feasibility study Scouts Australia has decided to introduce scouting in three communities on Cape York and three in the Northern Territory.



'You must, must, must involve the community all the way. It is their project not our project. Having the involvement and commitment from the elders to support the program right from the start is critical.' Bruce Munro

It is well recognised by scouts that they will need to network with the other stakeholders in the area such as corporations, mining companies, community organisation, schools, local government, community health services, TAFE and other stakeholders.

Bruce explains, 'We have a project officer in the Cape York area. He has started talking to the target communities to confirm that they are interested in scouting within their communities and to identify potential leaders. Most importantly he will assess the communities' needs and expectations so that programs can be established to meet these'.

It is expected that each new scout unit will have five to 10 Indigenous scouting leaders who will receive initial and ongoing training through Scouts Australia.

By establishing programs to meet the needs and expectations of the communities it is hoped that they will quickly take ownership of the programs. In addition to traditional scouting there will be significant attention to cultural issues and non-competitive sport.

'First of all it directs itself towards young people. Secondly, it is something that is engaging and fun. Thirdly, it teaches very important values which scouting over a 100 years has shown world wide to enlarge a person's self esteem and prepare them for citizenship.' Sir Gustav Nossel

In another departure from other scout units, most groups in the new project will operate from the local schools directly following the final class of the day. During the feasibility study, without exception, school principals indicated that they supported the project and would make school facilities available after hours.

While mainstream units meet once a week the new program has far more flexibility, with more frequent offerings. The program itself will evolve over time. However anticipated activities will include:

- cultural programs – highlighting continuation of traditional Indigenous arts and skills;
- personal development - including literacy, numeracy and leadership training;
- community development – including environmental and heritage projects;
- recreational activities – including traditional games, abseiling and caving;
- skills development – including basic motor maintenance, bushcraft and hunting/trapping.

One area of major importance for the programs, which was clearly identified in the consultation process, is to provide opportunities for the elders in the community to connect with young people.

'Whether its Scouts or whoever, it is about increasing the number of young people in the communities with the skills, confidence, self esteem and resilience to help move those communities forward.' Bruce Munro

A major goal of the programs is to develop self esteem and skills to better contribute to the community. Most of all the focus is on participation and fun.

While very much in its formative stages the program is showing great promise. 'What we have found', says Bruce, 'is that to do these things properly takes time. For some this may be frustrating but we have to be sure that it will work, and that it goes at a pace the Community wants it to'.



14. NETWORKS FOR A NATIONAL AGENDA

Ausyouth was funded by the Commonwealth Government to provide leadership to support youth development across Australia. It relied upon the ability to engage with a diverse range of stakeholders as a primary means of informing future directions for youth development in Australia.

About Ausyouth

Ausyouth was a national project which was established to provide a range of services to promote, coordinate and facilitate youth development as an approach and practice across Australia.

Ausyouth was a business partnership between the South Australian Government's Office of Employment and Youth and the South Australian Division of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

Ausyouth worked in several strategic areas:

- national communication between stakeholders;
- research into the profile of youth development in Australia;
- identifying and promote good practice in youth development;
- raising public awareness and engaging support for youth development;
- contributing to a future vision of youth development.

Resource publications, major forums, and a series of targeted workshops were the practical outputs arising from this focus.

Networks for a national agenda

As an approach, youth development, is fairly well developed overseas. In Australia however, while many agencies are actively engaged in youth development activities, the theoretical and policy position for this approach is still at an early developmental stage.

The Commonwealth Government wanted to further develop the concept of youth development and support the range of youth development initiatives across Australia.

In 2000 a tender for the support of youth development across Australia was released by the agency, known at the time, as the Commonwealth Youth Bureau. Subsequently the contract was awarded to Ausyouth.

At that point, the Ausyouth partnership was a totally new entity. There was a need to quickly develop a profile for youth development, engage with stakeholders and develop resources.

In a relatively short time Ausyouth developed strong relationships with a range of youth development provider organisations and set in train a new way of thinking about working with young people.



Devising a national approach to youth development was an exciting and equally daunting prospect.

Ausyouth set out to provide opportunities for people to come together to share their vision for youth development. In doing so it assisted in building new and strengthening existing networks of organisations and individuals.

'We wanted to encourage people working with young people from across a whole range of different sectors to become involved in the discussions about what youth development might mean in the Australian context.' Jan Patterson, Ausyouth

In the new relationships that developed, organisations involved with education began to relate to health organisations; the youth sector with business; and traditional youth development organisations with researchers and academics.

At first many of these organisations and individuals seemed to have little in common. Some of these organisations had been working with young people as their core business, whereas others had a central focus on issues as diverse as emergency services and environmental conservation. The differences between their core interests, their styles of operation and jurisdictions seemed greater than their similarities.

Indeed, initially in the early forums, participants were surprised by the diversity of sectors represented and wondered if they had anything in common. What Ausyouth saw, however, was a great potential for these diverse interests to be drawn together by a common desire to engage positively with young people in a way that would improve youth development outcomes.

'Even in country locations people were meeting each other for the first time and discovering opportunities to collaborate.' Jan Patterson

From the outset Ausyouth's vision was for a sustainable, inclusive and robust youth development framework,

one which would be a recognisable and characteristic institution of Australia's 21st century landscape.

This, Ausyouth argued, could only be realised when all young people were valued for their role in and contribution to society and were able to participate in a wide range of opportunities for their positive and holistic development.

Discussion and engagement, with as many stakeholders as possible, including schools, business, community organisations and governments, was a key focus of the work of Ausyouth. A constituency of interest in youth development was built around providers of youth development activities as well as those with policy and research interests.

'At every workshop and forum we connected with people from a new organisation, service or program who were interested in the idea of youth development.' Jan Patterson

This required a significant allocation of time and resources. Ongoing formal and informal communication across the nation included conducting forums and workshops in every state and territory in Australia, in metropolitan and regional centres.

'Some people were surprised that they really had to "work" at the Ausyouth workshops — we expected them to actively participate in the group discussions on the various topics throughout the workshop program.' Jan Patterson

To facilitate the bringing together of those with an interest in youth development, Ausyouth established two advisory structures. These two groups encompassed a broad cross section of youth development constituencies. Meeting twice a year they assisted the project by providing guidance and advice, engaging with other stakeholders, and examining issues of common interest and concern. The first body was the Ausyouth National Advisory Committee, which was a collaboration between a range of organisations and associations with an



interest in youth development. The group was made up of young people, governments, peak youth bodies, business groups and youth development provider organisations. The group was instrumental in broadening the Ausyouth network.

The second body was the Ausyouth National Provider Reference Group. A diverse body, the group was made up of a range of youth development provider organisations, all with linkages to at least one of the state government sponsored youth development programs in Western Australia, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia, ranging from country fire service bodies through to traditional youth organisations.

The role of this group was to contribute to the creation of a positive environment that advanced the future potential for youth development. It did this by working through common issues, assisting with the collection and dissemination of information to state/territory structures and providing feedback on drafts of Ausyouth documents.

'At the first workshop of the National Provider Reference Group, participants barely knew what to say to each other. Four workshops later we couldn't stop them talking!' Jan Patterson

This body provided a 'grass roots' view of youth development. Individually and collectively its members explored the application of good practice, taking back to their organisations and programs ideas and strategies gained from the Ausyouth workshops.

From these wide ranging discussions and workshops and following extensive review and analysis of Australian and international literature about youth development, youth work, community development and community service, Ausyouth developed the document *Good Practice in Youth Development. A Framework of Principles*.

This document was a milestone in the consideration of youth development as an approach. For the first time in the Australian context youth development

had some definition and clearly articulated relationships to policy, organisation and program environments.

'Obviously, to promote the principles of good practice in youth development we have to work by them. Respecting the voices of the community organisations while having the independence to challenge them was critical.'
Nicole Gilding, Ausyouth

After the release of *Good Practice in Youth Development*, Ausyouth conducted numerous workshops around the country, to introduce the principles and encourage their application. The positive response from youth development providers, from business, from researchers, from governments and from young people indicated that this document had filled a gap in the Australian knowledge base about youth development.

There are indications that a number of organisations are applying the principles in a wide range of settings where outcomes for young people and their communities can be enhanced by a focus on better practice. Some organisations report wholesale reorientation and modernisation of their structures and processes and others are reviewing policies and procedures.

The building blocks for the positioning of youth development as a tradition for Australia into the 21st century are firmly in place.

For Australia this means that we now have an aspirational view of youth development. With this there is hope that the position of young people in Australian society will be greatly improved and that they are fully prepared and fully engaged in their communities so that both young people and communities benefit.

"I have often said that our role has been to empower others – we gained support and authority by sharing what we have learned."
Nicole Gilding



'SO MANY GOOD THINGS' – KEY THEMES FROM CASE STUDIES

The case studies offer insight into the application of the framework of good practice in youth development. They show that many different organisations in very different fields of endeavour are engaging with young people and their communities in ways congruent with the principles and informed by them.

The case studies are not exhaustive in terms of the coverage of the various bodies engaged in youth development. However they do show that a focus on the principles of good practice in youth development can, as Sherri McKerley from the Country Fire Authority (CFA) says, produce 'so many good things.'

Some of the organisations are explicitly and consistently using the principles of good practice in youth development in their work with young people and others are beginning to explore the application of this framework to their organisation and programs.

Irrespective of how the organisations are applying the framework of good practice, some common themes emerge.

A primary focus on the overarching principles of empowerment and conscious enterprise is demonstrated in each case study. This is the cornerstone for good practice in positive youth development.

Focusing on **empowerment** opens up opportunities for young people and encourages communities to realise the potential of young people as valuable contributors. In practice, empowering processes are pursued through a range of methods.

In some organisations, like the Australian Red Cross, there are activities that engage young people in the highest levels of decision making. Equally important for others, such as the Shire of Laverton, is the role young people have in organising a local activity such as a disco. In the CFA, learning and using a new skill in a community setting is an empowering process.

Conscious enterprise, which supports and provides opportunities for young people through sustained and sequential thought and effort, is another consistent theme.

The Victorian Council of YMCAs, for example, has focused on building a suite of programs which over many years provides opportunities for young people to learn about and engage with governments at a local, state and national level. Similarly CALM in Western Australia has developed a youth development program from a small start to one which now is well embedded in the overall structure and activities of a large government department.

Ausyouth argues that it is this intentional and deliberate focus on empowerment of young people and communities that provides the necessary context for optimising the outcomes, and producing a climate which is conducive to action with and for young people. It is this fundamental commitment that is the 'paradigm shift' offered by the youth development approach.

The following themes, which have emerged from the case studies, strongly reflect the underpinning principles of the framework of principles of good practice in youth development and have implications for the further evolution of the concept of youth development and its practice across Australia.



A focus on strengths

A focus on the strengths of young people, their families and their communities is vital in youth development. This allows high, yet realistic expectations to be set for young people and contributes to their holistic development.

However, there are entrenched attitudes and habits which focus on the negative, and maintaining a strengths' focus requires constant vigilance. For this reason, regular discussion about a strengths' focus is needed within organisations, and in training and development opportunities. The ways in which a positive strengths' based approach to young people is demonstrated by adult leaders, identified in selection processes for paid and volunteer staff, and reflected in the structure and scope of activities, all require considerable attention and support.

The case studies show that strengths can be enhanced, whether it is a spark of interest or energy and enthusiasm, a willingness to learn, or a unique perspective on living in particular communities.

Organisations enhance strengths in a variety of ways. By acknowledging young people as key stakeholders in youth development initiatives, some organisations provide substantial resources to engage with young people and integrate their thoughts and ideas into policy development and program design. Others have established specialist youth advisory structures.

Some have focused on retraining adult paid and volunteer staff so they can pinpoint their own strengths and those of the young people they work with.

'Focusing on strengths and empowerment, make high standards achievable whereas negative perceptions of youth lead to low expectations of youth capacity', says Garry Snowden, from Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA).

The focus on strengths has other benefits. It encourages the community to see young people in a different and more positive light which in turn strengthens their connection with their community. Directly related to this focus on strengths is the commitment to celebrate achievement and participation.



Inclusive practices

Inclusive practice allows all young people and their communities to benefit from youth development programs and activities. A commitment to flexibility, community engagement, and participation in decision making by young people are three critical aspects of achieving more inclusive approaches. Flexibility in these programs and activities will ensure that individual needs of local communities and young people can be met. This is particularly important in providing access and inclusion for communities who have not participated in traditional youth development activities.

The recognition of diversity in the community and the desire to enable different groups to benefit from positive youth development was evident in many case studies. The level of success in each case varied, however many demonstrated a commitment to try new approaches and utilise partnerships in an attempt to 'open up' programs.

Some of the case study organisations have recognised the barriers that exist for many young people and communities in accessing opportunities. Flexibility in programs, along with different styles and avenues of promotion, are both useful in overcoming these barriers.

For some organisations this has required them to develop strategies to broaden their 'usual' constituency and seek ways to include other groups. Many have made or strengthened links with other structures and organisations as a way to get in touch with diverse sections of the community.

Leadership within the organisation is needed and training can play a critical role in preparing an organisation to embrace new groups in culturally appropriate, non-tokenistic and genuinely empowering ways. Trust is an important feature of relationships with marginalised groups. A principled approach is most likely to build and sustain trust.

'Although attracting participants has proved relatively simple with invitations going to schools and youth service providers, finding young people not in the school system has proved the trickiest and we are always looking for better ways to get a broader range of people involved', says Peter Newling, from the Victorian Council of YMCAs.

Critically the case studies demonstrate that it takes time to engage with young people and communities who have been marginalised. Education and support for individuals and the community is needed and organisations have to be both consistent and persistent.

'It is not a job that can be completed quickly. There are long timelines in establishing the foundations of effective developmental work with young people who are disengaged from school, work and often the family', says Howard Sercombe, from the Shire of Laverton.



Flexibility in programs and activities

The adoption of a 'one size fits all' approach will not deliver the same benefits and outcomes as will a flexible program or activity that is cognisant of individual skills and capabilities. Flexibility allows the best opportunity for individual needs to be met. The case studies show that catering for young people of varying backgrounds and abilities requires flexibility.

However, flexibility needs to be based on strong understanding of the 'non negotiables' for any program, and clear expressions of preference from young people and community. Flexibility does not imply a laissez-faire approach.

This also indicates a need to have flexibility in program planning, where the focus is on the outcomes and expectations of the individual and not on the delivery of a rigid program structure. Involving young people throughout the program design stages is highlighted in many of the case studies as a necessary strategy to develop programs which sufficiently cater for diverse participants.

'I see my role as a facilitator, the program development is evolutionary and not fixed by CALM', says Bronwyn Humphreys, Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM). The need to respond to local contexts and to customise activity to meet different needs requires program leaders to be confident about their program methodology and intention, and open minded about the activities which might be appropriate. Even long standing adult leaders need to revisit and renew these understandings in order to undertake continuous improvement processes effectively.

Some case studies show how the same program can be delivered in different ways in different communities or for different individuals but achieve the same intended outcomes. This flexibility needs to be matched with available resources and the time for paid and volunteer staff to respond to requests or to draw out new ideas. Paid and volunteer staff require skills in facilitation and communication to successfully do this.

'The hardest part about doing my Award wasn't the activities, but filling in the log book. Once we worked out I could provide a verbal report through cassette tapes things became a lot easier', says Darryl, participant, Duke of Edinburgh's Awards.



Real experiences and outcomes

For young people to gain a full sense of accomplishment, real experiences that provide individual and/or community outcomes are vitally important. Flexibility in programs means that meaningful experiential learning activities are very evident across the case studies. Many are characterised by learning in 'real life' situations.

For some, the emphasis is on community service where young people make a difference in their community. For others, it is the opportunity to engage in decision making which will influence the organisation itself.

While practice and simulation play an important part in learning, it is the opportunity to apply those skills in arenas in which young people can really make a difference that both excites and challenges young people who participate in youth development opportunities.

'Young people are motivated by positive challenge and value the intrinsic rewards of doing well. They care for real projects, not artificial 'make work' projects', says Garry Snowden, from CVA.

Practical experience in a challenging and fun environment was also highlighted in many case studies. These provide new and different opportunities for young people in which to develop team and leadership skills.

The case studies show how the varying interests, skills and abilities of the participants can be accommodated. Sequential learning that recognises this and allows some young people to act as leaders and mentors was a characteristic of some case studies.

Many programs and organisations wrestle with the balance between the desire to systematise, document and produce 'the manual' for universal application and with their understanding of the need for 'authenticity' in activity and the importance of local contexts in programs.

Local leadership, founded on strong commitment to the principles of good practice in youth development, is most likely to enable program and opportunistic approaches which do not compromise either quality or integrity.

The youth development environment must be able to stretch young people, and this sometimes means taking risks. It is important that programs do not become so 'risk averse' because of concerns about litigation that the 'real life' experiences, which are such a feature of the case studies, are no longer available. Instead organisations need to embed well understood risk management practices throughout their programs and activities.



Communities that value young people

Young people are integral members of the community but are often portrayed in a negative way, particularly in much of the popular media. Community members often reflect this and can hold similar negative views. When young people are engaged more directly with the community, and there is a focus on the strengths of young people, this view is challenged.

Communities that value young people as active participants offer the opportunity to develop positive relationships. They also assist young people to have a stake in the community now and foster an optimistic outlook for the future.

Many of the case studies describe opportunities for young people to be positively engaged with the community. When community members have the chance to see the strengths of young people, attitudes and opinions tend to change so that young people are viewed in a positive light.

Where a program or activity has a sustained presence in a community there is the opportunity for successive and diverse affirmation of young people and less focus on the elite 'exceptions' to the prevailing negative image. All organisations involved with young people need deliberate strategies to 'model', both within their organisation and to the wider community, how and why they value young people and respect their views.

Many case studies highlighted the variety of ways in which youth development programs and activities increases the positive perceptions the community has of young people.

'The best thing about this program is that it gives a positive image of young people – because they deserve it', says Bill Wagner, York District High School.



Young people engaged with their communities

Multiple opportunities for young people to engage with other community members have benefits for young people and their communities. It not only provides opportunities for young people now but also lays the foundations for their ongoing involvement.

Whole of community planning processes for youth development will maximise the opportunities for engagement. Where community organisations and governments are 'joined up' in a local 'conversation' about social, educational, environmental or economic progress there is an excellent opportunity to take a coherent, whole of community approach to engagement of young people and application of the youth development approach.

The case studies demonstrate a number of ways in which young people are involved in their communities. Some demonstrate service directly to others in the community, some show involvement in regenerating community infrastructure, and some involve young people in organisation or community decision making.

Relevance to young people is enhanced when they are given opportunities to serve the community and are then recognised for their achievements. In the case studies this is shown to build mutual respect and to foster positive relationships with people outside the young person's immediate social or family circles.

'The community gets something tangible done, like the creek being cleaned up, and graduation is the chance for significant people to raise the importance of this. Young people really appreciate this', says Garry Snowden, from CVA.

'We have found that Councils are really keen to listen to what young people have to say. They have asked young people to consider some serious community issues', says Peter Newling, from Victorian Council of YMCAs.

Young people's engagement comes not only from involvement in youth focused issues but in 'the mainstream'.



Young people in decision making

Involving young people in decision making allows their needs and aspirations to directly influence communities, organisations, programs and activities. This means that their needs are more likely to be met and the community receives the benefit of their unique perspectives.

The most consistent feature of the case studies is the desire to engage young people in decision making. This is evident at different levels, from influencing government decision making to involvement in program design. Of all the underpinning principles of good practice, concerted attention to engaging young people in decision making increasingly appears the best place to start, and the one which is initially pivotal in linking a commitment to both empowerment and conscious enterprise to the practical processes of change at organisational or program level.

'We get the opportunity to build on the enthusiasm and idealism of young people to make it an organisation that young people wish to become part of', says Sue Hubble, from Australian Red Cross.

Some organisations have developed formal advisory structures for young people's involvement in decision making and some involved young people directly on organisational boards and committees.

Opportunities for young people to take responsibility for choices they make in regard to program and organisational decisions are common.

'The young people basically ripped apart my draft program to come up with the things they wanted to do – it was great to see', says Sue Hubble.

Involving young people in decision making at all levels requires paid and volunteer staff to develop particular skills and knowledge. Good communication skills are always important, but effective group leaders are not necessarily experienced in formal meeting procedures, or in advocacy in more formal settings.

'I've found that I have to let go and allow the groups to come up with their own way of doing things – that seems to work the best', says Bronwyn Humphreys, from CALM.

Paid and volunteer staff utilise their skills to seek and promote young people's voices, but expressing an opinion is not enough. They must also develop with young people the avenues for these thoughts to be taken up, whether this is within an organisation or a community.

'The young people in the management committee had never been to a business type of meeting, so it was all new and interesting. I had to make sure I did a debrief with them afterward', says Howard Sercombe, from Shire of Laverton.

Importantly, involving young people in decision making means organisations are best able to meet their needs. Their ideas are less filtered and constrained by other influences and they learn important skills about how organisations and communities work, and how they might be influenced.

'Facilitating young people's participation in decision making assists in ensuring that the services and programs provided by the organisation will be relevant and continue to be relevant to young people in a changing society', says Mark Stanton, the New South Wales Police and Community Youth Clubs (PCYC).



Recognition by peers, schools, and community

Recognition provides incentives for ongoing learning and engagement with the community. It provides opportunities for advancement in programs or through other structures such as schooling. It incorporates and requires both celebration and reflection.

Recognition by peers, schools, and community leaders features in some of the case studies. Several included opportunities for presentations of certificates or awards at formal functions, while others aligned the young people's program involvement with school curriculum.

'It's great to see young people get so much from the program and with the accreditation some can now see that "hey I'm doing science when I do this"', says Bronwyn Humphreys, from CALM.

Most case studies employed at least one method of formal or informal recognition. These opportunities are used to emphasise the fact that those involved in the program or activity are part of something larger than they may have realised. For organisations it may be that young people's interest in their larger vision or mission can be underestimated. This interest was very evident in some of many of the organisations featured in the youth development case studies.

'One of the strengths we have with our cadet program is that we run the entire program on Friday afternoon in school time. This means that all of the cadets are together for some of the time and this helps to create a sense of belonging to something bigger – our cadet unit', says Bill Wagner, from York District High School.

Most offer some recognition for being a participant, while some recognise the development of certain skills and others recognise young people for their contribution to the community. For some, recognition includes the opportunity to be mentors or leaders in programs or to be involved in higher level decision making bodies. Significantly, youth development environments sometimes offer opportunities for success that have not been available to the young person through the formal school system.

Where young people have been involved in decision making the recognition can take many forms. The opportunity to be acknowledged by making formal presentations to government or organisational boards is one form of recognition as is the chance to implement a program or activity for others.



Skills and commitment of key people

One element that was very evident throughout the case studies is the commitment from key paid and volunteer staff to supporting young people. Without the skills and commitment of key paid and volunteer staff some youth development programs and activities would not be possible or would quickly stagnate.

Paid and volunteer staff are most often the key point of contact between an organisation and young people. They engage with young people at multiple levels, from the provision of programs and activities through to the development of complex policy.

In organisations that do not have work with young people as their core focus (and in some that do), paid and volunteer staff with a youth development role are required to educate others and open avenues that would not otherwise exist. In the CFA case study for example, the experiences described 'helped other people recognise what youth development is and how it can be applied to an organisation who's core business is fire fighting', says Sherri McKerley, from CFA.

This is done to extend the experiences and opportunities for young people but also to attempt to build broader commitment from the organisation and the community. In this way the key staff are able to build sustainability into the youth development approach within their communities.

As the case studies show, paid and volunteer staff need to have skills in a variety of areas. They must be able to communicate with young people and facilitate their development; they must plan, implement and evaluate their program and activities in the organisational context; and they must be capable of enlisting community support and building community networks. The importance of appropriate initial staff selection, and of continued investment in people through ongoing training is very evident.



Building sustainable approaches

While key paid and volunteer staff can initiate and offer drive for youth development, building youth development in a sustainable manner is crucial. Young people need ongoing support and opportunities for development so that they are full participating members of their community.

Part of a sustainable approach is the development of an explicit set of values, explicit behaviours derived from these, and a strong theoretical base for programs. Self conscious and regular reflection on the organisation's performance and programs in the light of this is needed. Sustainability and quality go hand in hand in a process of continuous improvement.

Paid and volunteer staff demonstrate in the case studies how they go about influencing organisational approaches so that youth development is a part of an organisation's cultural and policy make up. For this to occur principles must be embedded – not just a veneer.

In some cases this has taken the form of major reform involving substantial changes to the structure and function of the organisation. In others it has meant staff developing relationships within the organisation and building a degree of acceptance of the youth development approach amongst other key people.

When this occurs people without a youth specific function in the organisation can be involved in, and become advocates for, youth development. This allows organisational resources to be utilised in different ways and opens up young people's experiences with new ideas and opportunities.

'Within CALM there are now 50 officers involved with Bush Rangers in the regions. It's not seen as "Bronwyn's program" – their energies make it all happen', says Bronwyn Humphreys, from CALM.



Include all of the stakeholders

Youth development programs or activities are best done in consultation with the various stakeholders, including young people. The expectations of stakeholders are therefore articulated and reviewed and then form the basis for evaluating the success or otherwise of a particular program.

Multiple and conflicting expectations will not serve the interests of young people or the program in which they are involved.

'We have to be sure we are meeting the needs of young people as much as we are meeting government and political needs', says Stephen Blight, from *active8*.

Stakeholders include a range of people and organisations that potentially bring with them a variety of skills and resources that might otherwise not be accessible. Contributions from stakeholders are very carefully acknowledged in many case studies.

The case studies also show how the stakeholders' interests are considered. In many case studies programs and activities are designed from the start with these views in mind. Over time this approach builds a high degree of ownership from all of the stakeholders and helps make youth development sustainable.

'The whole school was involved in starting the cadets. We spoke with teachers, parents, the students and a host of people in the community before we started up', says Bill Wagner, from York District High School.

Any youth development activity will benefit from a planning approach which places the young people, not the institution, at the centre of activity. From this centre the relationships, partnerships linkages and gaps in the range of stakeholders (who provide the context and infrastructure for youth development in the community) need to be explored and mapped.



Partnerships

Partnerships work best when the strengths of the various partners can complement each other. This avoids duplication of effort and resources and highlights new and different ways of doing things. Partnerships were common to all case studies.

Partnerships in the case studies included relationships between businesses, education providers, governments and youth development providers. These were often developed on the basis of formal or semi-formal agreements. In these agreements the role of the partners is spelt out and expectations therefore remain quite clear.

'The schools have really taken care of all of the risk management issues. They have screened volunteers and have good systems in place to take care of the funding', says Bronwyn Humphreys, from CALM.

Most organisations in the case studies actively pursued partnerships. They often looked for potential partners who could offer something they could not, but were also sufficiently like-minded to work successfully together.

By working together for common goals partners in the case studies were able to enhance their own work. In recognising each other's unique perspective and expertise partners were able to blend well together to create new possibilities.

Effective partnership development requires particular skills at both local and organisational level and a commitment of time. Ad hoc 'good will' arrangements alone are unlikely to provide the sustainability required to optimise youth development opportunities.



Provider organisations in the community

Positive youth development is an approach – not just a set of programs or organisations. The case studies demonstrate some of the potential for the approach to be applied very widely. However, the current public profile of youth development is very much associated with a range of organisations who have provided programs in communities, often for many years. This is the current ‘public face’ of youth development.

They have an important role to play in informing youth development practice by drawing on their extensive experience and in opening up the field to new players, including forging new networks in communities. Clearly, provider organisations and the broader community and youth sectors need to partner governments at all levels if the rich youth development experiences offered by these organisations are to pervade our communities. Shared principles will assist collaboration at all levels.

Engaging with the various stakeholders and developing partnerships is assisted by a positive profile in the community. Youth development programs themselves are often instrumental in organisations achieving broader community goals.

The case studies show how an organisation’s profile and position in the community is important to the way in which local communities will engage with young people. Organisations that show the positive aspects of young people rely on their authoritative position to do this.

‘We don’t want to be “stuck on the edge of town”, we want to be involved with the community and the cadets is a great way to do this’, says Bill Wagner, from York District High School.

‘We are just starting to see the benefits of the approach we have taken. It will still take time to really have the community engage with young people and to develop the range of opportunities they should have’, says Howard Sercombe, from the Shire of Laverton.

Change requires both a sense of urgency and considerable patience.



Community benefits

Communities benefit from organisations pursuing good practice in youth development because young people who thrive can contribute in so many ways. Youth development activities, informed by robust principles, make the link between the rhetoric and the practice about the importance of young people as communities' most valuable resources. Valuable resources deserve investment, and when that occurs the benefits can be significant both immediately and in the longer term.

The most obvious community benefit, shown in the case studies, comes from the community service activities which young people undertake. Ranging from environmental programs and fire fighting through to surf life saving, community service in youth development is one part of the major contribution volunteering makes to Australia.

Several case studies also reflected on the enthusiasm and fresh views young people bring to community discussions. This was seen as welcome and stimulating. This, in turn, can assist the broader community to recognise and appreciate the contribution young people have to make.

Importantly, young people and other community members can come to see themselves as part of the same supportive social networks, so that there is mutual benefit from engaging with each other.

'The young people realise they live in a community and they have a contribution to make', says Bill Wagner, from York District High School.

'It was of great benefit to the young people's self-esteem, it served a community purpose (the installation of smoke detectors, park renovation and peer education program) and they demonstrated the ability to decide on how the money was going to be spent', says Sherri Mckerley, from the CFA.

The greatest benefit of the approach is seeing young people with competence and with confidence, with hope in the future, and with a sense of belonging.



Final thoughts

The case studies show a range of youth development activity at a moment in time.

The case studies confirm the benefit of the youth development framework as a positive approach to working with young people. They also challenge organisations to consider the principles of good practice in youth development as a way to maximise outcomes for young people, organisations and communities.

A focus on the two overarching principles of empowerment and conscious enterprise are fundamental and evidenced in many ways.

A focus on the underpinning principles is also vital. Not every case study organisation demonstrated that they were pursuing all underpinning principles at once. Indeed, the impacts of change in an organisation might be unmanageable if initiatives are taken on too many fronts at the same time.

However, the principles are synergistic and mutually reinforcing, and attention to every one of them will be needed over time. The case studies provide evidence that a strategic starting point in the exploration of the principles as a framework for planning, program development or for policy, is the involvement of young people in decision making. Where this is an initial focus, the implications for other areas are immediately felt and the challenges and possibilities readily identified.

Beyond this starting point the case studies demonstrate the need to focus simultaneously on the three clusters of principles directed towards young people, implementation and community. The focus is also needed across a number of the underpinning principles, in order to achieve positive outcomes. Integrated approaches are needed even if working across a limited number of the principles.

The case studies also provide evidence about the applicability of the principles to the three environments of policy, organisations and programs. When the organisations have demonstrated a more integrated approach to youth development and worked at all three levels, then the principles are most powerfully evidenced and influential.

What is also evident from these stories is that the skill, commitment, thoughtfulness and dedication of paid and volunteer staff is a key ingredient to better outcomes for young people and communities.

Not surprisingly, in a people focused endeavour, it is very apparent that the people who work in the field and champion the youth development approach have a great impact on the outcomes.

They engage with young people, build networks, develop programs and activities and contribute to their evolving organisations. In doing so they assist in building the sustainability of youth development within their organisation.

Acknowledging that 'it's the way that you do it that counts' highlights the need to empower paid and volunteer staff in youth development with tools to challenge their thinking, reflect upon their practice, encourage their innovation, and affirm their contribution.

The principles of good practice in youth development are shown in these case studies to be a contribution to a dynamic field in a state of rapid evolution.



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