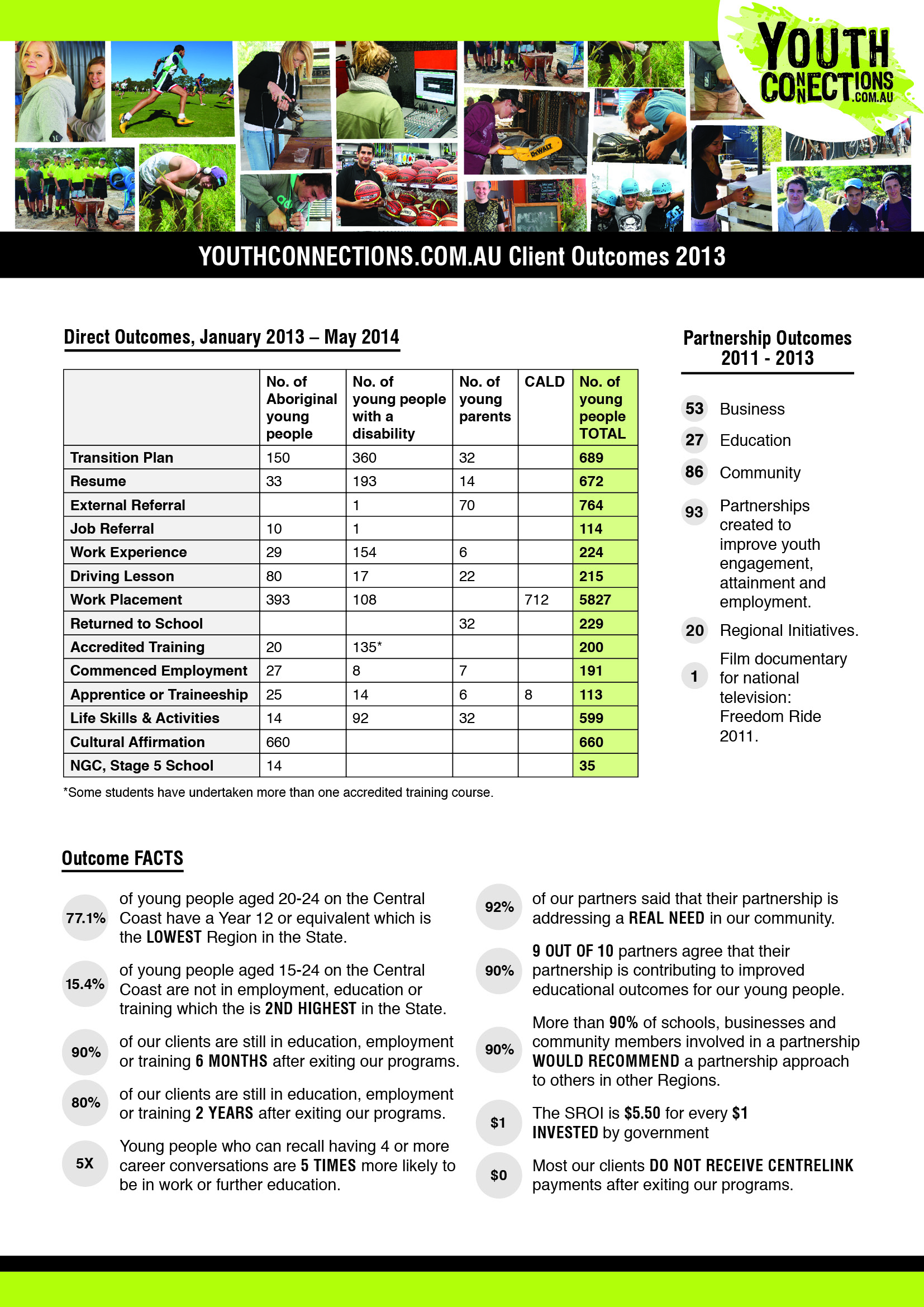
# Welfare Review - Submission by youthconnections.com.au

# Summary

* youthconnections.com.au strongly supports the focus placed by the Inquiry on Early Intervention to address the needs of disadvantaged youths most at risk of failing to make the transition into the workforce and to become productive members of their community. Much of this early intervention model, as described in Pillar 2 (and Pillar 3), operates already on the Central Coast of New South Wales through our organisation. We invite the McClure Review to visit or otherwise engage with us to show our approach, programs and facilities. [www.youthconnections.com.au](file:///C:\Users\maggie\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary%20Internet%20Files\Content.Outlook\OMIXE7UH\www.youthconnections.com.au)
* An actuarial approach to defining the target people for such social investment would have merit if well designed and pragmatically implemented. The New Zealand model of actuarial valuation seems too narrow as described (p86), focussing on the benefit-cost ratio of investing extra in a young person through early intervention now, versus the fiscal cost to Government of them receiving long-term welfare support. We recommend a more holistic valuation approach be taken that considers as well - modelled tax payment losses resulting from their lack of employment; wider costs on governments and society (e.g. justice system and antisocial behaviour (see p85); and the intergenerational consequences (see p87). This should take a national perspective reflecting costs to both the Commonwealth, States and local government, and encompassing a whole-of government perspective.
* We support the proposal for a solid focus on evaluating outcomes from targeted intervention programs. youthconnections.com.au has significant experience in tracking studies on young people receiving our services. In our experience, the case for early intervention in disadvantaged young people through well designed, implemented and evaluated programs is clearly demonstrated. An actuarial approach to investment in disadvantaged young people need not be overly exact on the mathematics – the benefits of whether to invest are clear cut; how much to invest warrants progressive assessment.
* The Review implicitly indicates support for a Whole-of-Government strategy to addressing investment in disadvantaged young people to maximise their prospects of a successful transition into the workforce and adulthood – encompassing the social services, employment, education and indigenous portfolios. More emphasis should be given to this, given growing evident weaknesses in this foundation.
* Decisions of the government in the 2014-15 Budget to terminate successful programs in this area (notably Youth Connections in the Education portfolio and Partnership Brokers in the Employment portfolio) run contrary to the directions being promoted by the McClure Review under Pillars 2 & 3. There is urgency to plug this gap; or otherwise successful and long-standing organisations such as ours are likely to cease operating by the time the Government begins to implement a new welfare strategy; and it would take a long time to rebuild that institutional and social capital.
* The Review makes little mention of Commonwealth-State responsibilities in a new welfare system. A coherent and integrated whole-of-government strategy is needed by the Commonwealth. The present model of support for young disadvantaged people contains critical weaknesses that seem to arise from a narrow, short-term fiscal perspective.

**About Us**

Youthconnections.com.au has grown and developed over 20 years to provide currently services to 8,000 young people in the Central Coast region of New South Wales, and more broadly across the State. Our focus is two-pronged – services to young people with various kinds of disadvantage (from jobless and welfare dependent families, very young parents, those with mental health problems, those with disabilities, and those with low levels of educational attainment and aspiration); and work placements and experience for those in vocational courses and apprenticeships. In the last year we achieved:



*Link to web site:* [www.youthconnections.com.au](file:///C:\Users\maggie\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary%20Internet%20Files\Content.Outlook\OMIXE7UH\www.youthconnections.com.au)

*Link to annual report* http: <http://www.ycannualreport.com.au/>

*Link to University of Newcastle evaluation:* <http://www.youthconnections.com.au/content/filelibrary/BuildingGreenCentral_email.pdf>

*Link to TSP report:* <http://issuu.com/youthconnections.com.au/docs/transition_support_project_evaluati/0>

*Link to yJob outcomes:* <http://issuu.com/youthconnections.com.au/docs/yjob_final_report/0>

## Pillar Two: Strengthening individual and family capability

Reforms are needed to improve lifetime wellbeing by equipping people with skills for employment and increasing their self-reliance. To strengthen individual and family capability changes are proposed in the areas of mutual obligation, early intervention, education and training, improving individual and family functioning and evaluating outcomes.

### Mutual obligation

| Participation requirements for young people can place them at a disadvantage. There are a number inhibiting factors including transport disadvantage, no driver’s licence or lost driver’s licence (due to driving offences or fines), homelessness, drug and alcohol dependence, no money.  Young people gain more from working in a team such as a community enterprise project <http://www.youthconnections.com.au/land-management>. Team work results in increased productivity and performance because groups that work well together can achieve much more than individuals working on their own. Working in a team provides young people with a broader range of skills that can be applied to practical activities. It involves sharing and discussing ideas and can play a pivotal role in deepening a young person’s understands of a particular subject area. Being part of a team, young people develop interpersonal skills and work readiness skills such as speaking and listening, leadership, and working with and motivating others.  For young people, knowing more about themselves and collaborating with others will help identify their own strengths and weaknesses. Enhanced self-awareness helps their approach to learning and how they approach employers when seeking employment. Community Enterprise Projects are place based responding to local community and industry need and should be supplemented by vocational learning transitioning to work experience.  Case management to support young people in their participation requirement and to meet their obligations is essential to mitigate inhibiting factors. This includes transition planning, job coaching, referral to other support agencies and regular follow up. |
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### Early Intervention

| **Early intervention** is the most critical element of a sound national employment and social outcomes strategy. The strategy needs to include mechanisms for identifying young people in their teenage years who are at risk of failing in educational or vocational training attainment and consequently failing in making a successful transition into the workforce and a productive adult life; and then providing intervention pathways that will develop their skills and attitudes so that they can re-enter the regular education system, vocational training or apprenticeships. The Outcome of the strategy is that many of these people when reaching adulthood are operating within mainstream society with productive jobs, and are not operating within the welfare system.  youthconnections.com.au has demonstrated the successful effect of modest investment in young people struggling with various kinds of disadvantage – unemployed families, teenage parents, mental health problems, homeless, drug dependent, Indigenous, or disabled. If those young people are identified sufficiently early and proper intervention programs and professional support are provided at the right time, the majority do proceed to return to the mainstream education system or enter vocational courses and apprenticeships.  We support an early intervention model that is underpinned by an actuarial investment model. However, the New Zealand model as described (p86) seems too narrow, focussing upon only the benefit-cost ratio of investing in youth now compared to the long-term impost on Government fiscal outlays through welfare. We recommend a more holistic valuation approach that encompasses as well - modelled tax payment losses resulting from lack of employment; wider costs on government and society (e.g. the justice system and antisocial behaviour (see p85); and the consequences of long-term welfare of that person in terms of risk their children also becoming welfare dependent (see p87).  An effective employment and social outcomes strategy encompasses several Commonwealth Portfolios, principally education, employment, social services and indigenous. Especially in the area of early intervention, the strategy must link these in a coherent and integrated fashion. The target person can then follow an understood and logical transition pathway into employment and productively contributing to society.  Present arrangements of the Coalition Government are not fully coherent and integrated across Portfolios. In the area of early intervention for disadvantaged youths, the Commonwealth has operated a succession of programs over at least 20 years, for example the Youth Pathways and Local Community Partnership Programme of the Howard Government, reflecting evolving employment and social outcomes strategies of successive Commonwealth Governments. However, the most recent Youth Connections Program and the Partnership Broker Program will terminate on 31 December 2014, and the Coalition Government has put nothing in its place and has stated it currently has no intention to do so.  Its rationale (letter from Education Parliamentary Secretary, Senator Scott Ryan (<http://issuu.com/youthconnections.com.au/docs/lewis_macfie_20140710165714/0>) is that State and Territory authorities require children up to 17 years of age to be engaged in education (training or work). In practice, the States do not have in place the breadth and depth of programs to deal with these disadvantaged youth (certainly in New South Wales as relates to the Central Coast), and there has been no agreement with the States that the Commonwealth will overnight transfer all this role to the States.  This is a highly flawed position on disadvantaged youth and runs contrary the Commonwealth’s objectives on maximising employment prospects for disadvantaged young people and reducing the ongoing fiscal cost of welfare benefits when youths fail to succeed in the transition into the workforce and into productive community members. The illogicality is evident when the Government justifies the Commonwealth role as focussing upon Trade Support Loans, Work for the Dole, and HELP loans for students in higher education – each of which is irrelevant in terms of developing youth who will be incapable of entering an apprenticeship or completing secondary education without early intervention, and becoming unemployed welfare receive no substantive training or acquisition of transitioning skills provided by Work for the Dole.  The consequence of the decision to terminate the Youth Connections and Partnership Broker Programs, without any successor intervention by the Commonwealth, is that our organisation is at substantial risk of early closure (as are others). Given that current Commonwealth education policy is running contrary to the directions of the McClure Review in the area of early intervention for disadvantaged youths, the Inquiry might recommend that the Government act urgently to make some form of bridging arrangement for continuing early intervention activities, ahead of deciding a full package on a New System for Better Employment and Social Outcomes. |
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### Education and Training

| Young people who would benefit most from foundation skills in school and vocational education are often those locked out of the school gate and the non-attenders. Those so disengaged from education that they will leave school at the mandatory age and who have little or no family support or other intervention to fall back on, will not find their way into employment or training.  TAFE is an adult learning environment and many courses offered by competing Registered Training Organisations do not tolerate or have the capacity to work with “at risk” youth who can be disrruptive, have barriers to learning and who have no social or community connections to provide them with leads and introductions to employers. This leads to persistent low skill and achievement level culminating in long term unemployment.  Evidence from the Youth Connections Program supports the notion that if literacy and numeracy are not at a sufficient level in the transition from primary to secondary school, then there will be no success or intervention at secondary school and the young person will become increasingly disengaged.  It is also the Youth Connections Program that picks up disengaged young people outside the school gate and directs them to alternative learning environments more suitable to their learning style, more forgiving of bad behaviours and with more emphasis on improving literacy and numeracy through contextualised vocational learning.  This is complemented with intensive case management and referral to other agencies that can provide solutions to disrupters in young lives like homelessness, drug and alcohol dependence, domestic violence, mental health, teenage parenting and extreme poverty.  Intensive employment case management is also the answer to successful job placement and job retention with regular post placement support. Disadvantaged young jobseekers need regular matching and referral to available job vacancies and training. They need to be followed up by phone, social media or in person to keep connected to the task at hand – the employment search. In many instances these young people need to be walked to services such as Centrelink, the JSA and job interviews. They need to be advised on managing finance, appropriate dress and personal hygiene.  Social enterprise as a soft employment entry point supported by vocational accreditation provides a sound way to enhance earn and learn initiatives. Add to this youth labor hire or group training and there is a transition point to the open labor market with the young person still supported and monitored by mentors and field workers.  The following link demonstrates a proposed Learning to Earn initiative that youthconnections.com.au presented to Senator Scott Ryan that would improve school retention, provide important vocational skills and accreditations to disengaged young people and provide employment pathways to “skills in demand” occupations. <http://issuu.com/youthconnections.com.au/docs/yc_youth_learning_to_earn_initiativ/0>  Enterprise education is a solution for young disengaged from mainstream education. In this model the purpose of their education is not only to fulfil Board of Studies requirements, but to also undertake vocational and enterprise learning where there is a capacity to earn while you learn. E.g. The Danish Production Schools and Ngaruki Gul Gul Central <http://www.youthconnections.com.au/NGC> This model provides learning out of the classroom and contextualised into real vocational tasks practised with the guidance and support of case managers, behaviour experts and skilled and compassionate teachers and trainers.  Youth Pathways and Youth Connections programs have proven successful over the years as early intervention programs by supporting young people to continue with their education. The Local Community Partnership and Partnership Broker programs have enabled these young people to imagine career possibilities and job choice. These programs bring employers into the classroom and workshops to mentor, provide industry advice and perspective and to offer work experience. |
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### Improving individual and family functioning

| Young people with poor family support have the worst employment and education outcomes. Programs to reconnect young people and families need to be accessible and offer a holistic approach to service delivery that is client driven and strength based. The objective should be to support young people within the family before conflict leads to Homelessness by promoting family unity and building on the choices, opportunities and inherent strengths of the young person, their family and the community in which they live. Young people need to be encouraged to build valuable community connections so that they can enhance their independence, safety, self-esteem and/or quality of life within the community and use these connections to find employment opportunities.  Intensive assistance is case management whether it is to enhance family functioning, provide support to overcome barriers to employment and engagement or to secure and maintain employment. It is intensive and regular assistance that will achieve employment and social participation for people with complex needs as is evidenced by the current Youth Connections Program. <http://issuu.com/youthconnections.com.au/docs/yc__infographic_lowres/0>  . |
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### Evaluating outcomes

| The approach proposed on monitoring and evaluation of early intervention programs is sound. This would best be directed at both the level of Outputs from service providers based on program objectives and requirements and upon Outcomes over the longer term for young people participating in the programs.  Outputs reporting and evaluation has been commonplace for some time in the area of Commonwealth early intervention programs, under program management requirements.  However, youthconnections.com.au has also initiated longitudinal tracking studies that show the success for those young people over time. Evaluations conducted in the last two years are [http://issuu.com/youthconnections.com.au/docs/transition\_support\_project\_evaluati/0](http://issuu.com/youthconnections.com.au/docs/transition_support_project_evaluati/0%20)  <http://www.youthconnections.com.au/content/filelibrary/BuildingGreenCentral_email.pdf> |
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## Pillar Three: Engaging with employers

### Employment focus – making jobs available

| For many disadvantaged young people (including young people with disabilities and mental health issues), successful transition has been made easier by the programs created and assisted through the Partnership Broker Program. This federally funded program creates linkages between young people and employers. These partnerships enable businesses to engage young people in their own organisation or their industry sector and support pathways to employment in areas of skill and or labour shortage.  Partnership Brokers work on the growing mismatch between the skills young people have and the skills employers are looking for. In fact the Partnership Broker Program by engaging business as partners in a young person’s education, influences the prevocational training he/she will chose. That will generally be vocational training to match local skill demand enabling young people to be equipped for the global economy.  National surveys undertaken by the Partnership Broker Network evidence that in 3 years 2398 schools and 1811 businesses have participated in the Partnership Broker Program; 28% of the employers involved said they would take on more graduates if they had the appropriate skills sets; 90% of employers agree that their partnership is contributing to improved educational, employment and vocational outcomes for young people. <http://issuu.com/youthconnections.com.au/docs/pb_infographic_lowres_91b20a107408dd>  The Partnership Broker Program is about local business-led covenants that generate employment, training and work experience opportunities for our local disadvantaged youth, 1:5 industry contacts throughout an individual’s educational experience enables the young person have a smoother transition to the world of work.  In 2010 youthconnections.com.au undertook the major refurbishment and renovation of an abandoned state government juvenile justice vocational learning centre. This project was funded under Jobs Fund Round 1 and created 65 apprenticeships and traineeships, resulted in 120 young people undertaking vocational training in Conservation and Land Management, Construction Pathways and Horticulture (Indigenous). 250 young people were provided with work experience opportunities and for the 12 month duration of the renovations and refurbishment, the retention rate for all apprentices and trainees was 100%. All apprentices were placed with host employers on completing the project  <http://www.youthconnections.com.au/content/filelibrary/BuildingGreenCentral_email.pdf>  Successful long term outcomes for these young people were possible because they were recruited and placed through a group training company. All young people selected for employment or work experience on the site were disengaged from formal education, unemployed and referred by JSA providers, or were unable to compete successfully in the open labor market. The building of Green Central, as a social enterprise experience created large numbers of entry level jobs in skill shortage vocations in an area of unprecedented high unemployment rates for 15 – 19 year olds. Many youth employed at Green Central were Indigenous and young people with a disability. Since the opening of Green Central in 2011 apprenticeship, traineeship and work experiences opportunities have been created in the social enterprises operating from the site including construction, automotive, engineering, horticulture, Indigenous café. In fact the outcomes achieved in the past eighteen months from this site with young people most disadvantaged in our labor market, can be viewed at the link:- <http://issuu.com/youthconnections.com.au/docs/yc_client_outcomes_email/0>  The use of a group training company to employ, mentor, troubleshoot, case manage and provide pastoral care is the success factor in enabling young people to hold their job and complete their apprenticeship. Social enterprise provides the soft employment entry point so that young people are allowed to make a mistake without losing their job. |
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### Improving pathways to employment

| Disadvantaged young people have many barriers to engagement in education, training and employment. In fact, a young person who is homeless, who is suffering depression and has no money cannot learn or earn. Other barriers to engagement include poor literacy and numeracy, domestic violence, disability, parenting and caring responsibilities.  An important and necessary aspect to transitioning is intensive case management to have their barriers to engagement addressed. Currently this role is performed by the federally funded Youth Connections Program. Disadvantaged young jobseekers are often members of jobless families. Consequently they need considerable exposure to industry, employer’s expectations, vocational skills, career pathway planning, mentoring and coaching. The Partnership Broker Program fills this niche by creating the opportunities to link young people with industry expectations and mentors.  When a young person presents as willing to work, case management is necessary to get them work ready. This means they will need to demonstrate they can turn up on time, communicate, and work as a member of a team. The case manager’s role is to ensure this work readiness training is provided. They may need to refer their young person to pre-vocational training. They assist with resume development and interview techniques; they coach, support and mentor. They refer their young person to jobs, follow them up, and have regular – weekly is best – contact. This model was highly successful under the federal Jobs Pathway Programme 1996 – 2004, NSW Government Independent Employment Advisors 2011 – 2013 and yJob 2014. <http://issuu.com/youthconnections.com.au/docs/yjob_final_report/0>  Young people from a disadvantaged background also need to have their destination monitored and managed. Post placement support for at least 12 months will ensure that any issues are addressed and the young person does not slip into long term unemployment if their initial placement is not successful. Evidence based research suggests that a young person will have up to 6 transition glitches from the time they leave school to the time they are age 25.  Vocational training with a job outcome is always the preferred method of transitioning young people into employment. However, the vocational experience and accreditation combined with work experience is of great benefit to disadvantaged young people who have little or no employment skills. Matching these young people straight into a job after completion of a cert 11 or 111 (if they are capable of achieving a Cert 111) would set them up for failure. Work education accreditation, work experience, career pathway coaching and mentoring then referral and support into higher level vocational training is the model used by youthconnections.com.au to achieve better employment outcomes for young people long term. It is a reality that often young people in transition do not know what vocational pathway they wish to pursue and therefore should be exposed to a variety of career and vocational options.  School based apprenticeships and traineeships whilst providing good vocational pathways and opportunity for disadvantaged and low achieving students are underutilised and not encouraged through the VET systems in schools. The administration required to secure an SBAT opportunity; recruit a candidate through the school system; arrange time tabling for HSC requirements and vocational learning; negotiate the employment times and days with the employer; and manage the crises points in the employment of the students - is overwhelming and often non-productive for schools. SBATs are better when linked to Trade Training Centres.    School systems have difficulty in creating partnerships with employers and industry groups. This activity is best managed by Partnership Brokers. Successful partnerships of this nature have been formed with Brisbane Water Secondary College and Peninsular Village Aged Care Facility as well as St Phillips Christian College and WestTrac.  More SBAT opportunities could be secured if employer incentives were increased and if there were financial incentives for students to complete their SBAT and achieve a Cert 11. |
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### Supporting employers

| From the time a young person presents for employment, there must be case management to ensure he/she has the necessary employability attributes and is supported to seek a career pathway. For 20 years youthconnections.com.au have worked with young people in transition from school to work, most young people do not know how to get a job. Disadvantaged young people have even greater barriers to employment because they have few role models or mentors that can offer advice or provide employment introductions.  Young people need to have an individual transition plan and to be continually matched and referred to available jobs or training opportunities by their case manager.  Employers regularly say they want employees who are job ready, vocational skills can be learnt on the job, but appropriate work place behaviours, time management, communication and team work can’t. These are the skills that need to be attached to the young job seeker.  <http://issuu.com/youthconnections.com.au/docs/yjob_final_report/0>  This report is evidence of what can be done in a short period (4 months) with young job seekers falling through the cracks. Their employability and industry exposure has been turned around.  If a young job seeker is registered for 6 months with a JSA before receiving an offer of intensive assistance, then it is already too late. |
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## Pillar Four: Building community capacity

## Role of civil society

| Jawun Iniatitive linking Aboriginal communities and organisations with corporate secondees is a proven success model in developing, engaging and growing Indigenous business and community capacity. [www.jawun.org.au/](file:///C:\Users\maggie\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary%20Internet%20Files\Content.Outlook\OMIXE7UH\www.jawun.org.au\)  This model could be very effective on a wider basis in growing social enterprise or community organisations with a social purpose of improving employment outcomes, reducing disadvantage and growing community capacity.  Social venture loans to develop social enterprises are expensive, often unsuitable and generally not available for start ups. One initiative that supports start-ups is The Crunch. This is a Victorian Government sponsored initiative with just 3 places offered annually to interstate social eEnterprise concepts. Low cost seed funding for start ups is funded by the Victorian Government and only available to Victorian social enterprises. The model of The Crunch minimises the risk of social enterprise failure and matches The Crunch participants with corporate mentors and MBA students. It provides a 6 month intensive business management course which is industry informed to ensure success. <http://www.socialtraders.com.au/start/dsp-landing.cfm?loadref=223>  Place-based initiatives to build community capacity and to encourage employment participation have included Better Futures Local Solutions. On the Central Coast transformational projects such as the Better Futures Hub (school for very young parents incorporating full time early learning, parenting courses, vocational training in business administration and community services for jobless families and young parents, social enterprises in event management, back of office and café and catering, iDialogue café and telecommuting centre) has created a space where young parents and jobless families can connect to their community, improve their educational attainment, be supported into employment, gain work experience and raise their aspiration. In 2013, three young parents attained their HSC, one young parent gained admission to university and the other 2 commenced Cert 1V studies at TAFE. The young participants at the Better Futures Hub have case management support through Youth Connections Program and job readiness support and coordination through the in-house RTO and GTO.  Volunteering may work for an older age group but young people engage in this activity in a different space i.e. social media. Young people also engage on a global level rather than a local community level. <http://issuu.com/youthconnections.com.au/docs/submission_to_inquiry_into_voluntee/1?e=3186758/8861998>  A new horizon is emerging for digital technologies to be utilised to enhance a young jobseeker’s connection to mentors, case workers, peers, industry experts, career coaches and employability skills. This is how young people will be engaged and introduced to the world of work. |
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### Role of government

| It makes sense to incorporate into all funding for community capacity building initiatives a budget line for evaluation and SROI. |
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### Role of local business

| Across the Central Coast Region, 2500 employers provide annually work placement opportunities to young people undertaking vocational subjects for their HSC. These employers offer their time and expertise generously supporting our future workforce, and in many instances offering the young students part-time employment opportunities or apprenticeships. With incentivisation and promotion, micro-business could be persuaded to offer more employment opportunities. For 30 years traineeships have been offered nationally and apprenticeships for a far longer time. Today, many employers do not understand the system and the benefits for the future work force. If micro business were better informed and supported financially and administratively to employ young people in a training capacity, their business would benefit. |
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### Access to technology

| Shopping centres, community buildings, doctor’s surgeries, neighbourhood houses, cafes and government facilities are all places where information and communication technology should be located for disadvantaged job seekers to access. Traditional spaces such as libraries or community colleges can be threatening. Place- based initiatives that outpost Centrelink and other government support staff in community facilities and shopping centres allows for easier and less intimidating access. |
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**Community Resilience**

| The Better Futures Hub, an initiative of Better Futures Local Solutions <https://www.facebook.com/betterfutureshub> as a place-based model recognises that if a young parent is to aspire to attain a year 12 or its equivalent and create a career pathway, barriers to this achievement need to be addressed. This includes the best quality and affordable early learning for her/his child and an educational and vocational provider that understands the complexity and challenge of being a young parent. Intensive case management is necessary to provide referrals to outside agencies that address homelessness, mental health issues, drug and alcohol issues, domestic violence and transport disadvantage.  Young parents at the Better Futures Hub are part of a community, for some of them, that is the first time in their young life. It is this social participation that is the first milestone in creating economic participation. Social participation and connectedness allows for improved resilience.  Each community will have its own circumstances that need to be addressed. A place based solution is a direct and the best response to this. |
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