



Alternative education and transition pathways for early school-leavers

EVALUATING A DECD FLEXIBLE LEARNING PROGRAM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN REGIONAL SOUTH AUSTRALIA

"I think that the kids that end up here in the John Pirie-BoysTown model have a much better chance of achieving what would be considered mainstream outcomes at the end of the day"
(External stakeholder)

Written by Megan Price on behalf of BoysTown | August 2013



BoysTown

BoysTown is a national not-for-profit organisation that delivers services and programs for marginalised young people and their families in order to improve their quality of life and level of social inclusivity. BoysTown operates in all States and Territories of Australia. The organisation recognises the important role that education and employment can play in achieving quality of life and social inclusion, hence one of its key service areas is in assisting young people who are at risk of disengaging from mainstream education to reengage through alternative learning options.

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Abbreviations and Language

ACSF	Australian Core Skills Framework
BCIMS	BoysTown Client Information Management System
BKSB	The Basic and Key Skills Builder (software)
DECD	Department of Education and Child Development
ICAN	Innovative Community Action Networks
FLO	Flexible Learning Opportunities
LGA	Local Government Area
LLN	Language, literacy and numeracy
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Index for Areas
TAFE	(an institute of) technical and further education

With the exception of references made to ABS Census data, the term 'Indigenous Australians' is used throughout the report to refer to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people living in Port Pirie at the time of the evaluation.

"Thank you so much (BoysTown) for all
you have done for me over the years.
You have no idea how much
you saved me"
(Past Flipside client)



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Summary Overview

The evaluation of BoysTown's alternative learning program in Port Pirie, South Australia, found the service to be having an invaluable impact on young people living in the region, in relation to both tangible and intangible outcome measures. During the 12 month evaluation period (August 2011-September 2012), the Program provided services to 52 young people who were either at risk or had already disengaged from mainstream education, most of whom were from disadvantaged backgrounds and faced multiple and/or complex barriers to learning. The Program was found to be effective in either reengaging young people with mainstream education or transitioning young people into work, and developing their personal resilience and capabilities. This evaluation highlights the factors that are believed to have enabled the Program's success. It also identifies a number of important challenges faced by those involved in delivering and funding the Program.

Key Findings

Engaging Young People: The Program engaged young people through three types of services, each tailored to a different level of need. The three services included:

(i) Flipside - a block-style program involving basic literacy and numeracy training and case management for up to 15 young people per semester; (ii) Flipside Transitions – a block-style program offering more advanced literacy and numeracy training, accredited training, job-readiness training and case management, delivered to up to ten young people per semester; and (iii) a case management only service for up to 25 young people per semester.

Promoting Positive Wellbeing: Improvements in a number of motivational factors and social adaptation were evident among many young people who had engaged in the Program, particularly those engaged in Flipside and Transitions Programs. Specifically, improvements were seen in relation to young people's self-esteem, wellbeing, sense of optimism, sense of control over the future and goal orientation. Subtle but positive improvements were also seen overall in relation to cigarette smoking and aggressive and offending behaviour.

Re-engaging in Learning: During the evaluation period daily attendance at either the Flipside or Flipside Transition service ranged between four to seven participants per semester. Although attendance rates may appear lower than ideal, this level of attendance represents an increased rate of engagement in learning for these young people as compared to their prior attendance in mainstream education. In addition, participant feedback suggests the Program helped to re-ignite interest in learning for many of the young people involved.

Education Attainment: Client improvements were evident across a range of education indicators. For example, the amount of clients reporting to have good applied language skills, good writing skills and/or good numeracy skills doubled over the course of their Program engagement. Improvements were also reported in relation to listening skills, speaking and reading skills. In addition, seven out of the eleven (64%) young people who commenced a Certificate II during their enrolment were successfully accredited.

Transition Pathways: Eighteen of the 52 (35%) participants remained in the Program at the end of the evaluation period. Of the 34 that exited, 20 young people (59%) transitioned into further education and/or employment placement or specialist support, including 11 (32%) who had a confirmed education or employment position. While there were higher than ideal rates (18%) of young people who exited the Program due to young parenting responsibilities, it is somewhat comforting that most of these young Mum's transitioned into BoysTown's Parenting Support Program. Hence, their continued engagement with the BoysTown Port Pirie service will increase the likelihood of them re-engaging with educational support in the future.

Program enablers

A combination of literature and stakeholder feedback helped to identify a number of aspects that are considered critical in enabling BoysTown's successful delivery of this Program. These are believed to have worked in conjunction with Port Pirie's unique context and nuances. Specifically, these enablers include:


- A holistic, targeted and flexible service model
- An individualised, relational approach to clients
- An emphasis on personal development skills (as well as formal skills)
- A truly collaborative partnership with the school
- Strong connections with parents, the community and local agencies
- An early intervention approach to the minimum intake age
- Engaging, diverse and purpose-built learning environments
- Stable and seamless pathways to employment and training opportunities
- Highly skilled, authentic and experienced staff who are well supported

Program challenges

Despite its successes, the delivery of the Program was not without its challenges. These related to both the day-to-day operation of the Program as well as the broader political context in which the Program sits and the ability for all stakeholders and policy-makers to effectively recognise and acknowledge success. Specific internal challenges included the Program's vulnerability in relation to having limited staff to cover absenteeism and attrition, as well as having a significant bulk of the Program's knowledge and skill-set contained to one staff member. Limited resources, particularly in relation to IT and hospitality equipment also posed challenges for program staff.

At a broader level, the Program's future uncertainty due to the government's review of funding and possible model restructures in late 2013 raises a challenge for the Program's service delivery due to disruptions in being able to support client needs, staff feeling unsettled and concerned for their job security. Concerns also exist around whether a new service model would provide adequate support for young people's wellbeing and ensure they remain engaged in a form of education in the medium and long term.

A challenge also exists for policy makers, education authorities, funders and service delivery agencies in relation to evaluating these types of programs. Specifically, there is



a need to recognise both the educational and employment outcomes as well as the personal outcomes achieved for young people in the program, such as wellbeing, substance abuse and social skills. While formal measures are certainly valid markers of how effective a Program has been in re-engaging young people, they only partially represent the picture.

Policy implications

A number of factors were highlighted in the evaluation that warrant consideration by policy-makers involved in the review and funding of the ICAN program for 2014-16 as well as other re-engagement programs for early school leavers. These relate to:

- The importance of being able to provide an integrated service for young people in a setting that they are willing to engage with;
- The need to site re-engagement programs in settings where complimentary services are available;
- The value of ensuring a strong partnership exists between the mainstream education body and the service provider; and
- The value of including less tangible measures (e.g. wellbeing, social networks, substance abuse) as well as more common measures (e.g. attendance) in an overall assessment of a program's effectiveness.

1 INTRODUCTION

For many years BoysTown has been working with the Port Pirie community in South Australia, to support, mentor and train young people and provide them with pathways to continued education and/or employment. In order to respond to the diverse needs of young people in the region, BoysTown Port Pirie delivers a suite of services focused on alternative learning, employment training and placement, intermediate labour market social enterprise services and young parenting support and skill development.

In 2006 BoysTown piloted one of the first Flexible Learning Options (FLO) programs through funding from the State Department of Education and Child Development (DECD). The program is now in its seventh year in Port Pirie. During the evaluation period the program targeted young people aged 12 to 17 years (Grades 8 to 12) who had either disengaged early from school or were at high risk of early disengagement. Following the evaluation period, support services were extended to include students in Grade 7, as young as 11 years of age. BoysTown's FLO program is one of the only FLO programs in its region to target people of such a young age, with most other providers only accepting enrolments from young people aged 13 years and older.

The ICAN Flexible Learning Program

The FLO Program forms part of the Innovative Community Action Networks (ICAN) model, a major initiative of the Department's Youth Engagement Strategy and School Retention Action Plan.¹ It is based on the fundamental philosophy that it takes a 'village' to raise a child. ICAN aims to bring together young people, families, schools, community groups, businesses and government to find solutions which assist young people in completing their education. It supports the South Australian government's requirement that every young person must earn or learn until they turn 18 years of age.

BoysTown's Port Pirie site resides within the Yorke and Mid-North South Australia region². The region supports approximately 120 young people through ICAN's Flexible Learning Program and ICAN Case Management and BoysTown provides services to the bulk of these young people. Refer Table 1 for a list of all providers as at December 2012.

¹ <http://www.ican.sa.edu.au/> sourced March 2011

² DECD (2012). *Innovative Community Action Networks*. Sourced from http://www.ican.sa.edu.au/pages/Panel_of_preferred_providers/

Table 1. ICAN service providers in the Yorke and Mid-North South Australia region

ICAN FLEXIBLE LEARNING PROGRAM	ICAN CASE MANAGEMENT
Barossa Lower North Features	Barossa Lower North Features
BoysTown	BoysTown
-	Employment Directions
MADEC Australia	MADEC Australia
Mining Energy & Engineering Academy (Port Pirie)	-
Service to Youth Council	Service to Youth Council
-	Plaza Youth
Uniting Care Wesley (Port Pirie)	Uniting Care Wesley (Port Pirie)
Yorke Youth Services	Yorke Youth Services

The FLO Program is designed to address young people’s personal and training needs to help them overcome their barriers and gain the skills and motivation they need to transition back into mainstream education or continue on to further training and/or employment. More specifically, FLO aims to achieve the following:

- Reconnect and case manage young people who are enrolled at school and at risk of not attending
- Engage young people through extra curricula activities that build self-esteem, encourage peer support and enhance life skills
- Deliver education and training for young people to help them achieve an accredited course of study
- Provide mentorship to assist participants with individual issues
- Work with local support networks that provide joined-up service responses to those who are vulnerable
- Develop, implement and monitor individual goal plans

DECD remains largely flexible about what approach service providers use to achieve the above objectives, stipulating only that each participating young person receive two core service components, namely:

- (i) alternative education and learning opportunities
- (ii) individual case management.

At the time of reporting BoysTown was the only provider within the region to deliver both these components in-house through a ‘one-stop-shop’ block-style program. BoysTown also provides a case management only service for clients who are referred to other agencies for alternative education and learning. Schools make the decision on where to refer their students, and whether to split their referral between two agencies for each of the two program components. This decision is typically based on the best interest of the young person, giving particular focus to their current stage of learning and their capacity for learning in group dynamics.

Report Objectives

This evaluation was conducted by BoysTown's Strategy and Research Division. The purpose of the evaluation was to examine the effectiveness of the program, improve its current delivery and inform future directions for the program.

This report has been written to provide a synopsis of relevant literature and research, illustrative findings of the study, its limitations and implications. Throughout the report, findings from BoysTown's delivery of its block style program are differentiated from the findings from the organisation's delivery of case management only services where relevant. This is due to the distinct differences in the level and type of support that BoysTown staff provide in each of these programs. The findings from each of these groups are not directly comparable.

2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

To inform the research questions, a triangulated data collection process was used, drawing on data from a range of primary and secondary sources.

Interviews

In-depth interviews with Program staff and key external stakeholders:

Interviews were conducted with key BoysTown staff working on the Program, including representatives from the Program's primary partnering school and the regional DECD office. A key focus of these interviews was the perceived effectiveness of the Program, its key strengths and any weaknesses. Interviews with Port Pirie high school staff also provided anecdotal long-term destination data for 11 young people who had exited the program prior to the evaluation period. A selection of these stories have been presented in the report as examples of the long-term outcomes that have been achieved by some young people who have previously engaged in the Program.

Semi-structured interviews with young people: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Program participants at the beginning and end of school terms from July 2011 to August 2012. Young people were surveyed at multiple times throughout their engagement in the program in order to measure outcomes. The semi-structured interview tool used was based on a survey tool developed by BoysTown and Griffith University as part of an Australian Research Council Linkage Project (LP0776519), "Reconnecting disaffected youth through successful transition to work". The tool contains items from validated psychometric tests such as the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale.

The main focus of the survey was personal development. The variables measured included antisocial behaviour, offending behaviour, substance abuse, self esteem, literacy and numeracy, social support, community participation and future outlook. Other personal outcomes and overall satisfaction with the program were measured through open-ended questions and responses thematically analysed.

A total of 35 young people participated in the survey, including 28 who completed the survey at two or more points in time. Survey points were classified as either on entry, midway or on exit from the Program. In some instances throughout the report, only entry and exit results have been reported to help simplify understanding and readability.

Secondary and statistical data

Recent and relevant published research reports and policy documents were sourced and reviewed to inform best-practice standards and government priorities. In addition, a review and analysis of internal reporting systems was conducted to gain attendance and Program engagement data and information on the curriculum delivered.

Limitations

There are a number of methodological factors that limit the interpretation of the findings in this evaluation report.

Due to student absenteeism and logistical issues, it was not always possible to get each student to complete a survey at each of the survey time-points. Because of this, participant outcome results have been reported using a between-subject design (rather than a within-subject design). That is, the same group of students contributing to the pre data results are not always the exact same group contributing to subsequent data results. The obvious limitation of this is that it is not possible to interpret the results as a direct change in any one individual, but rather as an aggregate group only.

Secondly, while the results of this evaluation provide interesting insights from young people and service providers who have engaged with BoysTown's FLO Program in Port Pirie, the findings are not definitive nor are they representative of all populations of young people and service providers involved with FLO. Rather this evaluation contributes towards a growing evidence base which explores the role of flexible learning programs, the opportunities they present to young people who had (or were at high risk of) disengaging from mainstream education, and the effectiveness of BoysTown's delivery model.

3 CONTEXT

Government policy

The Federal Government, through the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) National Education Agreement, has committed to the objective that "all Australian school students acquire the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in society and in employment in a globalised economy"³. In line with this, the South Australian government has identified education, and specifically increasing school retention levels, as a key priority since their election in 2002⁴.

The mandatory requirements regarding school attendance differ between States and Territories. In South Australia, young people are required to adhere to the Compulsory Education Age (Federal) legislation that states "all young people between the ages of 16 and 17 are to participate full-time in an approved learning program, which is education or training delivered through a school, university or registered training organisation, an apprenticeship or traineeship, or a combination of these⁵."

Flexible learning options have been used in recent years by policy makers as one approach to address issues relating to disengagement from education and learning. That is, the detachment from mainstream education by a young person for whom school attendance is legally compulsory. The concept of flexible learning options evolved from a recognised need for policy makers and educators to acknowledge and respond to the diverse needs, learning profiles and learning speeds of students⁹. Providing a flexible learning environment is recognised as an important step in stimulating the interest and maintaining the motivation and engagement of young people, most of whom have shown a disinterest with the standard 'classroom-style' learning environment. This, in turn, has been found to increase the likelihood of a young person transitioning onto further education, training and/or employment, subsequently increasing their chances of successful life outcomes.

Early school leavers

While the majority of young Australians attend and participate in mainstream education, there are an increasing number for which less conventional, more flexible learning options and environments are required to assist them to either stay engaged or re-engage with learning.

Factors influencing early disengagement from education are many and varied, including learning difficulties, lack of family support, unstable accommodation, and incompatibility with conventional learning settings⁶, to name a few. What is clear from the evidence is that disengagement from school is likely to negatively impact on a range of factors later

³ COAG Reform Council. (2011). *Education 2011: Comparing performance across Australia*. Overview Report.

⁴ Department of the Premier and Cabinet (2009). *Innovative Community Action Networks: An Innovation of South Australia's Social Inclusion Initiative*.

⁵ <http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/docs/documents/1/AttendancePolicy.pdf>

⁶ Spierings, J. (2003): *Learning Alternatives: A Last Chance or a Real Choice*, Dusseldorp Skills Forum

in life, often resulting in higher levels of disadvantage among those who disengage early⁷. In contrast, the attainment of high school qualifications has been linked to greater employment opportunities, financial and social wealth, participation and inclusion in community and improved health and wellbeing. The provision of opportunities and assistance that can help young people avoid early disengagement and negative early employment experiences have also been found to help reduce the risk of negative long-term consequences for an individual⁸. There are also significant social and fiscal cost benefits associated with increased education attainment⁹.

Although the rates of early disengagement among young people have improved since the 1990's, the size of the problem still warrants intervention, particularly in many of the lower socio-economic pockets of Australia. At a national level, 7.8% of young people aged 15-19 years and 13.7% aged 20-24 years had disengaged from fulltime education without then engaging in employment or further training as of May 2012. South Australia showed similar rates at a state-level, 8.3% and 12.1% respectively¹⁰. It is reasonable to believe however, based on 2011 Census data regarding education attainment and the links between socio-economic status and successful transitions¹¹ that the rates of unemployed or inactive young people are higher in Port Pirie than the state or national averages. In support of this, a calculation based on Census data shows that 18.8% of 15-19 year olds and 24.6% 20-24 year olds Australia-wide and 18.3% 15-19 year olds and 28.4% 20-24 year olds from South Australia had disengaged from education prior to attaining an education level of Grade 12 (equivalent) or higher, as compared to 24.5% 15-19 year olds and 56.0% 20-24 year olds living in Port Pirie¹².

The local region

The city of Port Pirie is located on the Spencer Gulf in northern South Australia, 223km north of Adelaide and 91km south of Port Augusta. It is the home of the Nyrstar Port Pirie Smelter, the world's largest integrated lead, zinc and silver smelter¹³.

The Port Pirie Local Government Area (LGA) has the sixth largest population in South Australia. At the time of last census this included 17,333 persons, of whom 49.2% were male. A total of 4,678 families reportedly reside in the area, with an average 1.9 children per family. Almost three percent (2.9%) of Port Pirie's population is reportedly represented by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, compared to a state representation of 1.9%¹². Not dissimilar to many other regional centres, the majority of Port Pirie residents represent families who have lived in the region for generations. Of those residents who do migrate away from the region, many often return to live.

⁷ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. (2008). *Effective strategies to increase school completion report*, by Lamb, S. & Rice, S. DEECD

⁸ Liu, S. & Nguyen, N. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, Briefing paper 25, sourced in December 2011 from http://www.isay.edu.au/research/papers_search.html

⁹ Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010

¹⁰ ABS 6291.0.55.001 – Labour Force, Australia, Detailed – Electronic Delivery, Table LM3

¹¹ Circelli, M. & Oliver, D. (2012). *Youth transitions: what the research tells us*. A National Centre for Vocational Education Research Consultancy Report. Prepared on behalf of COAG.

¹² ABS, 2011 Census QuickStats, Port Pirie City and Dists (M) Code LGA46450 (LGA)

¹³ South Australian State Government, *Port Pirie: City of Opportunity*, sourced from <http://www.pirrie.sa.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/PtPirieBrochureFinal20308.pdf>

Although historically the town has been well-supported by its local mining industry, socio-economic data for Port Pirie indicates that many people living in the region experience disadvantage across a range of factors as compared to the rest of the state and the nation. In particular, 39.8% of households in Port Pirie receive a gross household income of less than \$600 per week, compared to 27.7% of households across the state and 23.7% nationally. Moreover, the unemployment rate in Port Pirie was 8.0% at the time of last Census, compared to 5.7% and 5.6% for South Australia and Australia respectively. Drawing on income, education and employment indicators, the Australian Government's Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) ranks Port Pirie City and Districts as the State's fourth most disadvantaged LGA¹⁴. It is widely known from a range of studies that such socio-economic disadvantage is commonly linked with poorer health outcomes, including higher rates of mental health issues and low levels of attainment in secondary and tertiary education.

Despite the many aspects in which the Port Pirie community experiences disadvantage, residents are also acutely aware that the region is nuanced and 'rich' in other ways. Not dissimilar to other regional areas, Port Pirie residents share a strong sense of community and have developed close-knit relationships, interest in and familiarity with other residents. Because local support agencies are also typically serviced by community members themselves, staff are often well aware of the local environmental context in which they operate, have existing ties with others in the sector and typically hold strong and personal motivations for wanting to see the broader community, particularly the community's young people, succeed.

¹⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2011). SEIFA Scores sourced from <http://abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/2033.0.55.001Media%20Release22006?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=2033.0.55.001&issue=2006&num=&view=>

4 ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE

The Program delivers personal development support, education and training to assist young people to re-engage with mainstream education or transition to further education and/or employment. BoysTown schedules the delivery of its Program in line with the two semesters of mainstream education. While the bulk of intakes commence near the beginning of each semester, the intake structure runs continually throughout the year (excluding school holidays) allowing new starters to join at any time providing there are places available.

Depending on a young person's individual needs, they may be enrolled in one of the three services provided through the FLO Program – (i) the Flipside Program; (ii) Flipside Transitions Program; or (iii) FLO Case Management only. See Table 2 for details.

Table 2. BoysTown's FLO Program services

<p>Flipside Program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Up to 15 young people per term• Provides a combination of literacy and numeracy training and support, accredited training opportunities, experiential learning, life skills training, exposure to vocational pathways and individual case management
<p>Flipside Transitions Program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Up to 10 young people per term• Provides training and accreditation in Certificate II in Business, job preparation and job search training and individual case management• Includes one-on-one literacy and/or numeracy training delivered by community volunteers with the support of program staff• Targeted to young people who have completed 12 months in the Flipside Program and/or show competent literacy and numeracy skills
<p>FLO Case Management only:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provides a range of counselling, support and referrals as needed

During the 12 month evaluation period there were 52 young people who participated in the Program. Among them, 67% were male (33% female) and all were aged between 12 and 18 years when they first enrolled. The average age on enrolment was 15 ½ years, which in South Australia is the typical age for someone in Grades 10 to 11. Seven participants (13%) were still young enough to be the typical age of someone in Grades 8 or 9 (i.e. aged 12 to 14 years). Among the 34 participants where ethnicity was known, five (15%) young people identified as Indigenous Australians.

For most young people, enrolment in BoysTown's FLO Program starts with either the Flipside Program or FLO Case Management. After a period, most then transition onto

another program within BoysTown’s suite of FLO programs or out of FLO into one of BoysTown’s other support services, such as the young parenting support, job support and placement services or social enterprise employment services.

The average number of BoysTown programs each of the 52 FLO participants had enrolled in throughout their time at BoysTown was two, ranging from one to five programs per person. The length of enrolment in one or more FLO programs ranged between four months and two and a half years, with an average enrolment of 12 months. Table 3 shows the breakdown of enrolments within each FLO program when taking a unique count of participants either at their August 2012 enrolment status or upon exiting the program (where this occurred prior to August 2012).

Table 3. Client enrolment numbers during 12 month evaluation period 2011-2012

SERVICE	TOTAL # CLIENTS ENROLLED	
	SEMESTER 2, 2011	SEMESTER 1, 2012
Flipside	15	15
Flipside Transitions (since January 2012)	N/A	6
FLO Case Management (only)	23	19
Total # unique clients enrolled during evaluation period:		52

Training and learning

The Flipside and the Transitions Programs are both delivered four days per week, Monday to Thursday from 9am to 2pm. The curriculum is based on a comprehensive suite of academic and personal development lessons which adhere to the requirements of South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE), ICAN and Certificate II accreditation.

Where the Flipside Program places a stronger emphasis on developing social skills, core learning skills and remedial academic teaching, the curriculum of the Transitions Program is more aligned to accredited learning with a lesser focus on behaviour instruction. The Transitions Program is a relatively new addition to BoysTown’s suite of FLO Programs, introduced in January 2012 in recognition of the different learning stages apparent among the Flipside participants, often influenced by participant age and the length of program engagement.

Research into the strategies effective in re-engaging young people with education and training, including a recently published review of research across nine EU countries, highlight the importance of including flexible, multi-faceted and experiential learning approaches^{15, 16}. In line with this, a key component of the curriculum for both the Flipside and Transitions Programs is its flexible, multi-faceted learning approach, where teaching is tailored to individual client needs and includes one-on-one specialised tuition

¹⁵ European Union. (2011). *Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU*, as cited by Sweet, R. (2012). *Unemployed and inactive youth: What works?* Prepared for DEEWR.

¹⁶ te Riele, K. (2012). *Learning Choices: A map for the future*. Prepared for the Dusseldorf Skills Forum, <<http://www.learningchoices.org.au/reserch.html>>.

where needed. Experiential learning and interactive workshops are also used to aid learning and encourage engagement.

On a weekly basis participants engage in out-of-the-classroom learning activities related to cooking, arts and physical activities designed to teach fundamental life skills such as nutritional meal planning, cooking and teamwork. These activities are also undertaken to promote and develop a sense of achievement.

Workshops are also regularly run by either internal staff or external facilitators depending on the topic. Program reports show that ten workshops were delivered to Flipside participants over the 12 month evaluation period and four workshops delivered to Transition participants during its first semester. The topics addressed in the workshops included:

Health and Safety:	binge drinking and personal hygiene
Interpersonal Relations:	effective communication, anger management, dealing with conflict
Life Skills:	budgeting, perceptions, getting your driving permit
Employment:	job search, employee responsibilities, developing a resume, job ethics

The Program is also fortunate to have access to a wide range of learning environments and facilities on-site, including several classrooms, a computer room, training kitchen, arts and craft room, a woodwork area and grass oval. The Program also has a minivan that allows for recreational and experiential learning activities to be conducted off-site when appropriate. Literature highlights that having such resources is important, particularly as it can enable out-of-classroom experiences¹⁷.

Individual case management

Young people enrolled in the FLO Program were often experiencing complex and multifaceted personal, family and/or peer issues that require specialised one-on-one case management if they are to effectively re-engage in learning.

Of the 35 participants surveyed upon commencement of evaluation, a number were experiencing unstable and disadvantaged living environments, including three participants (9%) living in unstable housing (including one with no fixed address) and eight (23%) living in public housing. Less than a third (27%) lived in a two-parent household, with the remainder living in either a single parent household (52%), with extended family (9%), with an unrelated adult carer (6%) or alone (3%). In addition to socio-demographic barriers, feedback from Program staff and client intake assessment records show that a high number of clients were experiencing multiple barriers to learning and social inclusion upon entry to the Program. This included a vast number who presented with issues relating to engagement in unsafe and risky behaviour, drug

¹⁷ Davies, M., Lamb, S. & Doecke, E. (2011). *Strategic review of effective re-engagement models for disengaged learners*. Prepared for the Victorian DEECD by the Centre for Research on Education Systems, University of Melbourne.

and/or alcohol misuse, anger management and/or needs requiring medical and/or psychological support.

The delivery of case management is conducted by two Program staff, one of whom focuses on case management full-time. Appointments are typically scheduled to occur with each participant at least once per week for up to an hour per session and more often during times of crisis. Sessions take place either at school, BoysTown's site, the young person's home or a comfortable and private public space. In line with evidence-based practice¹⁹, case workers limit their case load to five clients per allocated case work day. For the Program's fulltime Case Worker, this means a maximum caseload of 25 clients.

The Program's approach to case management is evidence-based¹⁸, drawing on strengths-based and relational approach practices. The approach is also consistent with the operational principles supported by the Australian government when dealing with young people requiring vocational and non-vocational supports to reengage them in education, training or employment¹⁹. The Program's case management process involves an initial assessment, conducted either between the case worker and young person only or including school staff and/or family members as needed, to identify the young person's individual strengths and barriers. From here an individual goal plan is developed, including time-lines, necessary supports and specific responsibilities. Further assessment is undertaken continuously and informs individual intervention strategies.

Staff's ability to effectively case manage clients is supported by BoysTown's custom-built electronic client information management system (BCIMS). The system allows for individual client data to be systematically recorded so that case management activities and client baseline and progress data relating to personal barriers and goals can be analysed and reported on at an individual, Program, regional and national level.

During the evaluation period, the range of support provided by case workers included:

- Counselling, support and specialist referrals
- Advocacy work (e.g. legal, health, housing)
- Negotiation with school authorities for a fulltime or gradual re-integration plan to mainstream education
- Assistance in gaining a learner's driving licence
- Career guidance
- Assistance in sourcing and applying for vocational training opportunities
- Assistance in gaining work experience and/or paid employment
- Registration with specialist employment agencies, such as BoysTown's Job Services

¹⁸ Becker, D. & Drake, R. (1994). 'Individual placement and support: A community mental health center approach to vocational rehabilitation', *Community Mental Health Journal*, v30(2), pp.193-206.

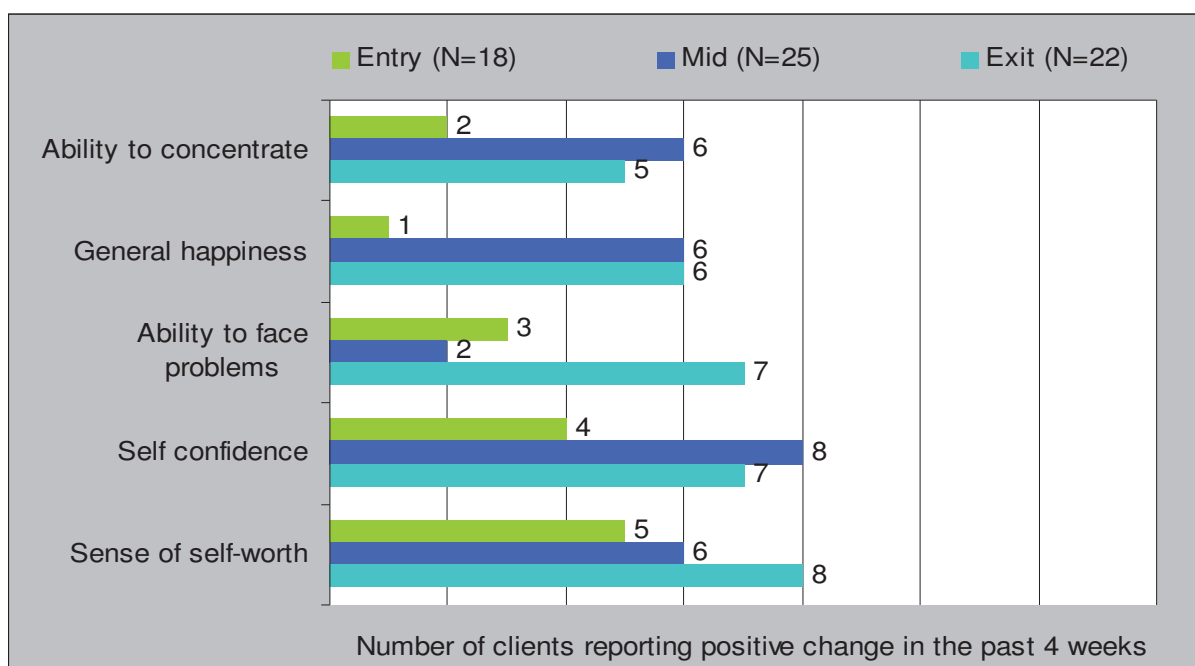
¹⁹ Lawlor, J. & Perkins, D. (2009). 'Integrated support to overcome severe employment barriers: Adapting the IPS approach', *Social Policy Working Paper No.9.*, The Centre for Public Policy and Brotherhood of St Laurence.

5 PROMOTING WELLBEING AND POSITIVE SOCIAL OUTCOMES

The emotional wellbeing of a young person can impact on how successful they will be in transitioning onto further education and/or employment, and adulthood generally¹¹. Emotional wellbeing encompasses aspects such as concentration, decision-making, general happiness and enjoyment of things, self-confidence, self-worth, feelings of strain, worry and ability to face and overcome problems.

A number of young people reported to have experienced improvements in their wellbeing since commencing the Program. In particular, improvements were commonly found in relation to general happiness, self-confidence and self-worth (see Figure 1). As shown in the qualitative feedback from young people, improvements in emotional wellbeing were often linked to participants feeling less judged, more supported and listened to. The benefit of being able to express individual feelings in a private, supportive and therapeutic environment was also acknowledged by some young participants.

Figure 1. Participant's self-reported changes in emotional wellbeing



"I feel like I have someone to positively talk to about my future pathways. It's built up my confidence" (FLO Case Management client)

"I didn't believe in myself at all so I didn't want to go to school or do anything" (client now regularly engages in learning and social activities) (Flipside-block client)

"I have more self respect and self-confidence now and I think I've become smarter. I went for my first job interview the other day and never would've done that if it wasn't for Boystown" (Flipside-block client)

"I've been talking to my Case Manager about personal problems and it's been very helpful to have some extra support" (FLO Case Management client)

"You don't get judged here like you do at school...it takes the pressure off"
(Flipside-block client)

"My relationships are better and I think better about myself now"
(Flipside-block client)

The Program, particularly the Flipside Program, also provides opportunities for young people to build their self esteem through the achievement of small academic, physical and creative tasks. Self esteem was measured using the widely-known Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale²⁰ which looks at individual's perception of their self esteem and self-worth. According to the scale, a score between 15 and 25 is considered in the normal or average range and scores below 15 are indicative of low self esteem.

As shown in the table below, at all surveyed points the average participant self esteem scores sat within the normal range. Among all surveyed participants, the average self esteem scores showed a slight improvement across the course of the Program (+0.65). Flipside and Transitions participants in particular, saw a notable improvement in their average self esteem scores (+2.1). Interestingly, FLO Case Management participants reported a slight decline (-1.47) in self esteem throughout the course of their engagement, however still sitting within normal range.

Table 4. Participant's self-reported changes in self-esteem (based on the Rosenberg scale)

SERVICE TYPE	ENTRY		EXIT	
	Score	# clients	Score	# clients
All Program Clients	17.21	19	17.86	22
FLO Case Management	18.25	8	16.78	9
Flipside and Transitions	16.45	11	18.6	13

"I think, as the program staff will tell you, the key to re-engaging a kid in learning is giving them a chance to be successful. Giving them this chance does wonders for their self esteem, it gets their confidence back and puts them in a place where they've no longer given up, which then means they can achieve. This program does this to a large extent."
(External stakeholder)

Positive social outcomes

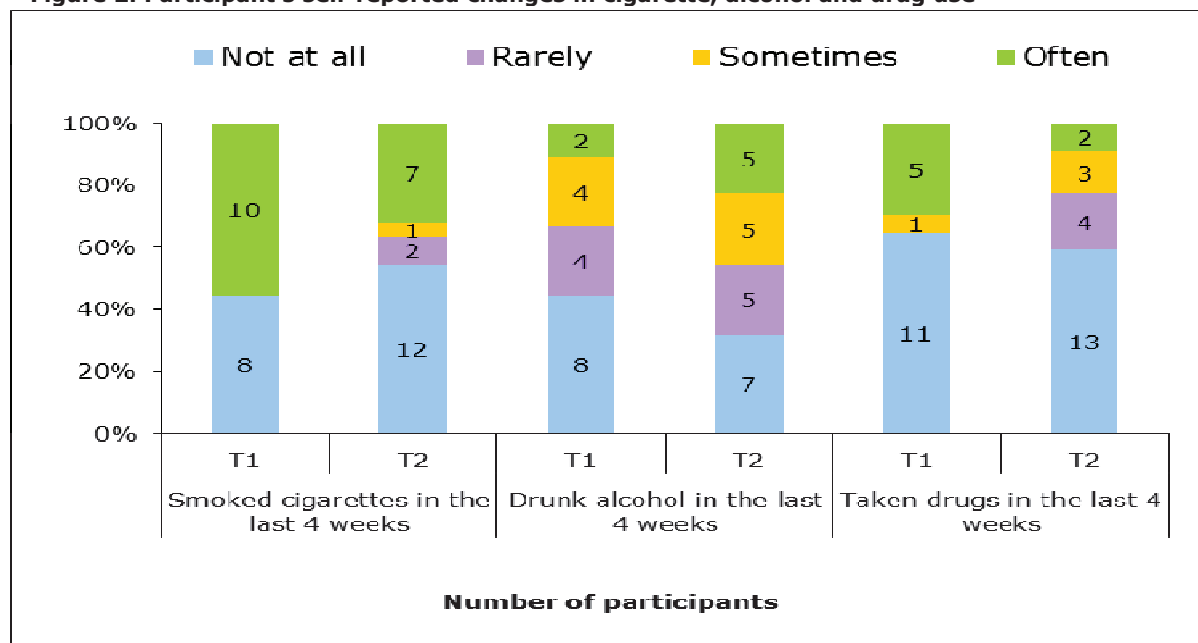
The use of substances such as alcohol and illicit drugs, aggression and/or illegal activity are behaviours commonly found among early school leavers, often presenting barriers to their re-engagement in learning and/or employment opportunities. In many cases these

²⁰ Rosenberg, M. (1989). *Society and the Adolescent Self-Image*. Revised edition. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

behaviours are inter-generational, heavily influenced by a young person’s social environment and/or part of a much greater issue in a young person’s life, making them complex barriers for Program staff to address. This complexity is evidenced through the minimal changes experienced by participants over the course of the evaluation period.

Upon commencing the Program, six out of 17 (35%) young people reported using illicit drugs in the past month, ten out of 18 (44%) regularly smoked cigarettes and the same number (44%) had engaged in underage drinking once or more in the month prior. During the latter stages of enrolment (including on exit), subtle but positive changes were seen in relation to cigarette smoking, with the proportion of smokers reducing from 44% to 32%. In contrast, the proportion of young people taking illicit drugs increased from 35% to 41%, however qualitative feedback revealed reductions in the frequency of drug use among some young people who continued to use. Alcohol consumption was another area showing proportional increases, with more young people reportedly drinking and with increased frequency, during the latter stages of their enrolment compared to program entry (up 39% to 83%). The fact that six of the 18 young people completing a follow up survey were either 18 years of age (or less than 12 months from reaching the legal drinking age) may have contributed to increased reports of alcohol consumption (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Participant’s self-reported changes in cigarette, alcohol and drug use



Rates of aggressive and offending behaviour were also found to show subtle but positive improvements during the course of participants’ enrolment in the Program. On commencing the Program seven out of 18 (39%) young people reported getting into one or more physical fights in the four weeks prior. This number reduced to five out of 22 (23%) during the latter stage of enrolment. The same rates were seen for young people reportedly getting in trouble with the police. That is, seven out of 18 (39%) reported having been in trouble with police in the four weeks prior to being interviewed on entry. After engagement with the Program, the amount of young people reportedly in trouble with police decreased to five out of 22 (23%) on exit.

Qualitative feedback from the participant interviews supports the quantitative findings, highlighting how some participants had learnt to control their anger and/or disassociate themselves from negative peer influences since being engaged in the Program. A number of proposed reasons that may have contributed to the increased number of young people avoiding physical altercations and trouble with the police include the development of communication and anger management skills taught in the Program, some young people altering their peer groups to avoid negative influences and also the amount of time each day being occupied by engaging in the Program, and subsequently less time being available for getting up to 'mischief'.

"I used to be arguing all the time at home but now we talk...it's been heaps good"
(Flipside-block client)

"I used to get in trouble with the cops and get angry all the time but BoysTown are helping me calm down" (Flipside-block client)

"I've learnt to control my anger a lot more. At school I was always in trouble, fighting with others and continually suspended. Here I've only had one take home in the whole time I've been coming" (Flipside-block client)

"I've settled down since coming here, stopped hanging out with the wrong people"
(Flipside Transition client)

"I control my emotions better now and get less angry" (FLO Case Management client)

Further evidence suggesting the Program's influence on reducing young people's involvement in offending behaviour includes the report from Port Pirie police that a "gradual but significant reduction in youth offending" was seen between 2004 and 2006, with the number of youth offences dropping from 236 to a little over 150⁴. This time period was when the Program first commenced in the region, along-with a number of other local ICAN initiatives.

Goals and future aspirations

Research has shown that if at 14 to 15 years of age a young person has set education-related goals, then the likelihood of them following a path toward their goal (rather than another direction) is increased²².

Upon enrolment in the Program no more than three quarters of surveyed participants reported feeling a sense of optimism about their future, a sense of control over their future and/or had goals and aspirations. After engagement with the programs however, these proportions increased to over 80% on all measures for the Flipside (block) and Transitions participants. Refer Table 5.

Table 5. Participant's self-reported measures regarding future outlook and goals, by program type

MEASURE	FLIPSIDE (BLOCK) AND TRANSITIONS		FLO CASE MANAGEMENT	
	INITIAL 3 MONTHS	LATTER ENROLMENT/ ON EXIT	INITIAL 3 MONTHS	LATTER ENROLMENT/ ON EXIT
Sense of optimism	7 out of 11 (64%)	12 out of 13 (92%)	6 out of 8 (75%)	4 out of 9 (44%)
Has goals and aspirations	8 out of 11 (73%)	12 out of 13 (92%)	5 out of 8 (63%)	5 out of 8 (63%)
Sense of control over the future	5 out of 11 (46%)	11 out of 13 (85%)	5 out of 8 (63%)	4 out of 9 (44%)

"If I hadn't come to BoysTown I'd be sitting at home doing nothing. (BoysTown staff) have encouraged me and pushed me. They've helped me know what I want to do and that makes me feel happy" (Flipside Transition client)

"At (mainstream school) I just didn't care, but now I'm thinking about my future a bit more" (Flipside-block client)

"I feel happier here (than at mainstream school) because I'm doing my Business course and working toward doing what I want to do" (Flipside Transition client)

"(The Program's) helping me reach my goals and get into further training" (FLO Case Management client)

Interestingly, findings from the FLO Case Management clients were less positive, with decreased rates of optimism and sense of control and a consistent number of young people having goals and aspirations on entry to the program as compared to latter stages of enrolment, including on exit. One explanation for this disparity between groups may be the additional vocation and job preparation training provided in the Flipside (block) and Transitions programs compared to the FLO Case Management program. That is, having regular exposure to BoysTown's supported employment programs and sharing space with the young people engaged in these programs (many of whom share similar backgrounds to FLO participants), may have helped Flipside and Transitions participants to see real and tangible employment options for their future, thus improving their perceptions of the future. Further exploration into this area may be warranted.

6 RE-ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING

The evaluation found that both participation in education and interest in learning increased for young people involved in the Program. For many young people this represented a shift from having no engagement with education (nor were they working) for months, in some cases years prior to enrolling in the Program, to a level of regular engagement in learning. Given the disadvantaged context and complex learning barriers experienced by most Program participants, the attendance levels seen in the Program were not surprisingly lower than those typically seen in mainstream education settings. However, they are noteworthy nonetheless, given many clients may not have otherwise reengaged with learning at all.

Specifically, the number of students attending daily ranged from four to seven young people per sub-program (representing 25% to 47% of students enrolled). The higher levels of attendance were seen in Semester 2 with the introduction of the Transitions Program and the related changes to the Flipside curriculum.

Attendance levels at Program workshops were similar to overall Program attendance (see Table 6). For both Flipside and Transitions participants, the workshops with the highest attendance levels were those related to Employability Skills, suggesting this topic may be more relevant and aligned with young people's interests and goals.

Table 6. Frequency, nature and attendance of program workshops

TOPIC AREA	DESCRIPTION	# OF WORKSHOPS	ATTENDANCE
<i>Flipside Program (Semester 2, 2011 and Semester 1, 2012)</i>			
Alcohol & Drugs	Binge Drinking Awareness	1	8
Driver Training	Getting Your Learners	1	7
Health	Personal Hygiene	1	7
Life Skills	Communication	1	6
Life Skills	Budgeting	1	4
Personal Development	Managing Emotions: Is it ok to be angry?	1	5
Personal Development	Changing Faces: Effective Communication	1	4
Relationships	Dealing With Conflict	1	4
	<i>Semester 2, 2011- Total workshops</i>	8	Average = 6 (out of 15)
Employability Skills	Developing a Resume	1	10
Employability Skills	Work Ethics	1	9
	<i>Semester 1, 2012 - Total workshops</i>	2	Average = 8 (out of 15)
<i>Transitions Program (Semester 1, 2012)</i>			
Driver Training	Getting Your Learners	1	4
Employability Skills	Job Search	1	5
Employability Sills	Employee's Responsibilities	1	5
Life Skills	Perceptions	1	3
	<i>Total workshops</i>	4	Average = 4 (out of 6)

"Last year I only attended a few days of Year 9 and then stopped coz I didn't like it. I actually go to school now" (Flipside-block client)

"I'm now attending about two days a week compared to going to school five days out of the whole year" (Flipside-block client)

In support of the attendance data, one of the most common themes arising from interviews with young people in relation to education was the extent to which the Program had helped re-ignite their interest and willingness to engage in learning. One likely contributing factor is the strong, respectful and positive relationships formed between many of the young people and the Program staff. Research has found that when young people around the age of 15 have strong bonds with their teachers this increases the likelihood of them engaging in education and training as they progress through their teenage years²¹. A young person having a positive attitude toward the school environment can have a similar effect, as well as increasing their aspirations for higher education²².

Participants themselves also provided suggestions as to why their interest and engagement in learning increased. These included the smaller size classes and the flexible, individually-tailored and more supportive nature of the Program's service delivery model. Feedback suggests that having a slower learning pace than mainstream school, shorter learning days (and weeks) and an increased opportunity for experiential learning also contributed to participants' increased interest in learning.

"Before BoysTown I was suspended all the time, at least once a week, just doing nothing. But now I'm rarely suspended....BoysTown gave me a chance and that's calmed me down heaps" (Flipside-block client)

"BoysTown has helped me to get more comfortable with learning and people. Before here I hadn't been to school for six months" (Flipside-block client)

"I'm interested in learning now. I want to finish school and get a Certificate II" (Flipside-block client)

"At school I'd get frustrated and couldn't do the work so I'd always be getting suspended. Here it's better coz there's less people so it's easier to understand" (Flipside-block client)

"They teach you at your level, not the same as everyone else so you get to do your own thing and progress when you're ready" (Flipside-block client)

"I like it much better than mainstream coz there's not as many students and the teachers explain and let you practice first, it makes the work a lot easier to understand" (Flipside Transitions client)

²¹ Semo, R. & Karmel, T. (2011). *Social capital and youth transitions: Do young people's networks improve their participation in education and training?* National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), Adelaide.

²² Khoo, S. & Ainley, J. (2005). *Attitudes, intentions and participation*, LSAY Research Report No.41, Australian Council for Educational Research, Victoria.

7 EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENTS

In recognition of the important role that language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills can play in longer-term employment outcomes as well as more immediate self-esteem and behavioural problems^{23, 24, 25}, the Flipside and Transitions programs embed LLN training into their curriculum. While Case Management only clients are likely to also be receiving some form of language, literacy and numeracy training, it is not typically part of the support provided by BoysTown, hence related outcomes for this cohort were not reported in this evaluation.

BoysTown's core tools for training and assessment on LLN training is primarily delivered using the Basic and Key Skills builder (BKSB)²⁶ specialist software and associated workbooks. Each student is asked to sit an online assessment on entry to the Program to determine their skill level, strengths and areas of need. BKSB tools are then used by students on a weekly basis for targeted tutoring and learning. In addition, both Flipside and Transitions Programs use Compass, an online literacy and numeracy assessment tool developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and recommended by DECD. The two systems work in a complimentary way to determine individual needs and support learning.

An analysis of student's LLN skills on entry to the Program indicated high levels of need in this area. Based on BKSB entry assessment scores, average literacy and numeracy scores for both Flipside and Transitions participants were found to equate to a Level 2 in the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF), representing a 'poor' skill level. Level 3 is considered the "minimum required for individuals to meet the complex demands of everyday life and work in the emerging knowledge-based economy"²⁷. Although follow up BKSB assessment data was limited, where it was available the average scores showed no movement within BKSB's seven score levels. However, there were many instances where students' follow up data showed proportional improvement within the 0-100 skill level range of each score level. This minimal shift further reinforces participant's complex needs in this area.

Another measure used to identify student's education achievements were self-reports from the participants themselves. Survey responses from participants in the Flipside and Transitions Programs found young people experienced increased confidence in their LLN skills after engaging in these Programs. In particular, the number of young people who believed that they had good applied language skills, good writing skills and/or good numeracy skills doubled over the course of Program. Moreover, 100% of young people

²³ Wridgely, H.S., Richer, E., Martinson, K., Kubo, H., & Strawn, J. (2003). *The language of opportunity: Expanding employment prospects of adults with limited English skills*. Washington DC, USA: Centre for Law and Social Policy.

²⁴ Gailbraith, A., & Alexander, J. (2005). 'Literacy, self esteem and locus of control'. *Support for Learning*, 20(1), 28-34.

²⁵ Clark, C. & Dugdale, G. (2008). *Literacy changes lives: The role of literacy in offending behaviour*. National Literacy Trust.

²⁶ The Basic and Key Skills Builder (BKSB) software and associated workbooks have been formally recognised internationally and by BoysTown and the Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE as an effective tool for improving the literacy and numeracy levels of users.

²⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006). Catalogue 4228.0 - Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, Summary Results, Australia.

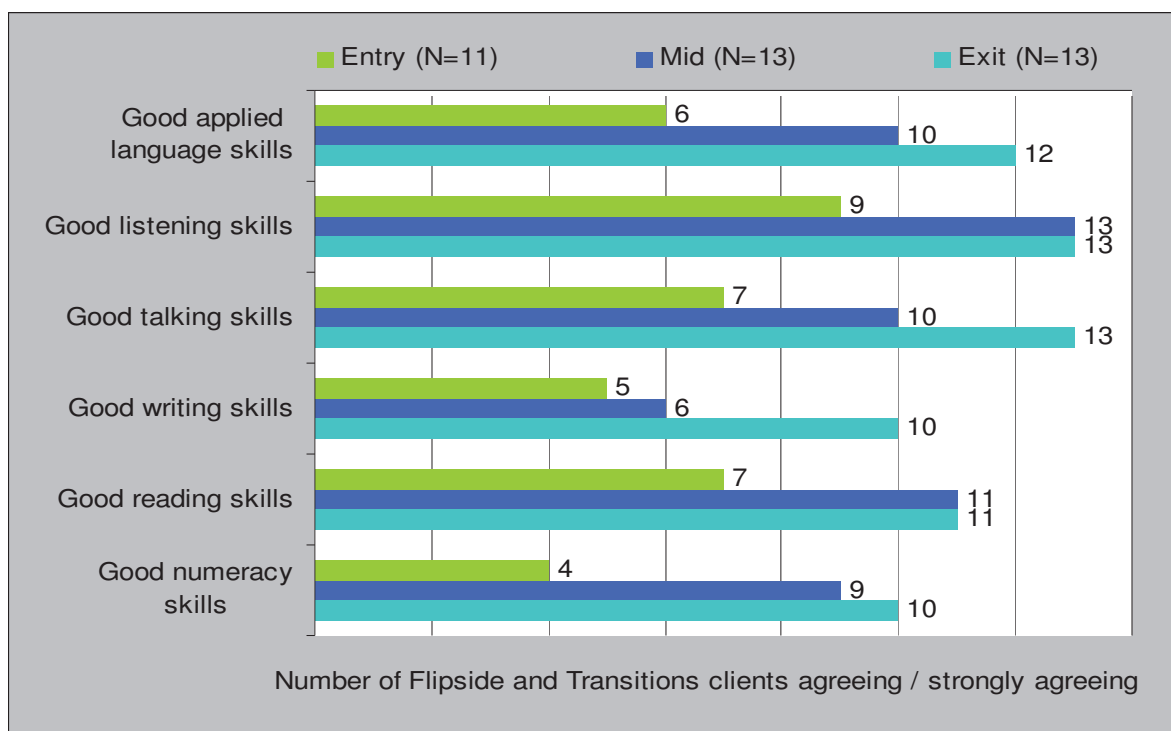
interviewed believed they had good listening skills and/or good talking skills on exit (refer Figure 3).

Qualitative feedback from participant interviews further highlighted the self-reported achievements in LLN. Similar to the attributions made about increased engagement in learning, many young people commonly attributed the smaller class size and the one-on-one tutoring to their improved results.

“I’ve just gotten better at everything. I’ve improved my maths and reading. I now just feel like I’m going somewhere (in life)” (Flipside-block client)

“I’ve gotten better at reading, English and concentration because I get the one-on-one teaching” (Flipside-block client)

Figure 3. Participant's self-reported changes in functional language, literacy and numeracy skills



In addition to school engagement and LLN outcomes, seven of the eleven (64%) young people who attempted a Certificate II as part of the Program were successful in achieving full accreditation and a further three (27%) received an attainment. Only one young person did not achieve formal accreditation. The Certificate II in Business was the most common accreditation achieved by Flipside and Flipside Transition clients as this was the course taught on-site as part of the curriculum. A Certificate II in Beauty Therapy was achieved by one FLO Case Management client through an external Registered Training Organisation (RTO).

8 TRANSITION PATHWAYS

One of the key objectives of the FLO Program is to prepare and transition young people into mainstream education, further accredited training and/or onto employment. Literature suggests that success in this area is often achieved by ensuring young people retain an association with conventional school settings²⁸ as well as access to employment opportunities and intermediate labour market approaches¹⁷.

The importance of keeping students engaged with mainstream education is recognised by Program staff and is evident through the strong relationship forged between staff at the Program and the local High school. Throughout their engagement in the Program students maintain their enrolment with the school and are regularly invited to attend special school assembly, sports days and other school events. Where appropriate, some students also complete some of their education at school each week. The FLO school liaison officer also regularly visits the site to ensure all students have the opportunity to maintain contact with school staff.

The Program's link to employment placement services and an intermediate labour market program on-site means that young people are also offered consistent and complementary services that can provide a holistic transition onto employment and/or job-based training. Having on-site access to peers who are already engaging in these services also provides young people with further support and role-modelling.

“One of the good things about BoysTown’s model is that clients can gain comfort and familiarity with staff through the Flippers program while they’re still young. BoysTown stays with them as they grow and then when they’re old enough BoysTown can transition them into work, either through their own job support services or somewhere else”
(External stakeholder)

Despite these beneficial links to longer-term pathways, feedback from staff suggests there are still many obstacles in transitioning young people from the program. In particular, the multiple and complex barriers faced by many of the young people mean that transitioning sometimes required a stepped and gradual process spanning a number of years. The young age of many participants is another factor that influences how ready and able a participant is for transitioning onto employment after a year in the Program. Finally, Port Pirie's region location can also interfere with transitions onto further education and/or employment due to limited local services and opportunities, and the inability or disinterest of some in moving to a major city²⁹.

At the end of the 12 month evaluation period, 18 of the 52 enrolled clients continued on in the Program. Of the 34 that exited, 59% transitioned into a further education and/or employment placement or specialist support service. Specifically, one third (32%)

²⁸ Atelier Learning Solutions. (2006). *Lessons for all: Final report of the evaluation of the Innovative Community Action Networks*, commissioned by the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services, Adelaide.

²⁹ Hillman, K. & Rothman, S. (2007). *Movement of non-metropolitan youth towards the cities*, LSAY Research Report No.50, Australian Council for Educational Research, Victoria.

transitioned to either a confirmed education, employment or training position, including 9% who re-engaged with mainstream education, 21% transitioned into BoysTown’s job placement and support service with the intent of finding paid employment. Six percent (6%) transferred to another FLO provider. The full breakdown of participants’ education, employment, training and other pathway outcomes is summarised in Table 7.

Overall, the high proportion of young people who transitioned on to, or stayed enrolled in, a supportive education and/or employment placement shows promise for the Program and the future of its participants. Moreover, while the rate of young people disengaging from education due to newfound parenting responsibilities is higher than ideal (18%), it is reassuring to know that most of these clients were transitioned onto BoysTown’s parenting support program, delivered from the same site, and thus will maintain contact with Program staff with the view of possibly re-engaging in FLO at a later date. Having this support option available and an ongoing link to learning avenues is likely to increase the chances of successful outcomes for these young people.

Table 7. BoysTown student destinations for enrolments 1 July 2011 – 1 August 2012

STUDENT DESTINATIONS AT TERM 3, 2012	# OF CLIENTS	% OF CLIENTS	CLIENT OUTCOMES BROKEN DOWN BY SERVICE MOST RECENTLY ENROLLED IN		
			FS	TRANS	CM
Continuing in Program	18		7	2	9
<i>TOTAL EXITED CLIENTS</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>23</i>
Employed	6	17.6%	4	-	2
Enrolled in TAFE education	2	5.9%	1	-	1
Enrolled with Job Services	7	20.6%	1	4	2
Exited due to new parenting role	6	17.6%	4	-	2
Re-engaged with school	3	8.8%	1	-	2
Transferred to other FLO provider	2	5.9%	1	-	1
Relocated to another region	6	17.6%	3	-	3
Unknown	2	5.9%	-	1	1

FS = Flipside; TRANS = Flipside Transitions; CM = Case management only

“I think that the kids that end up here in the John Pirie-BoysTown model have a much better chance of achieving what would be considered mainstream outcomes at the end of the day because of the Flipside Programs” (External stakeholder)

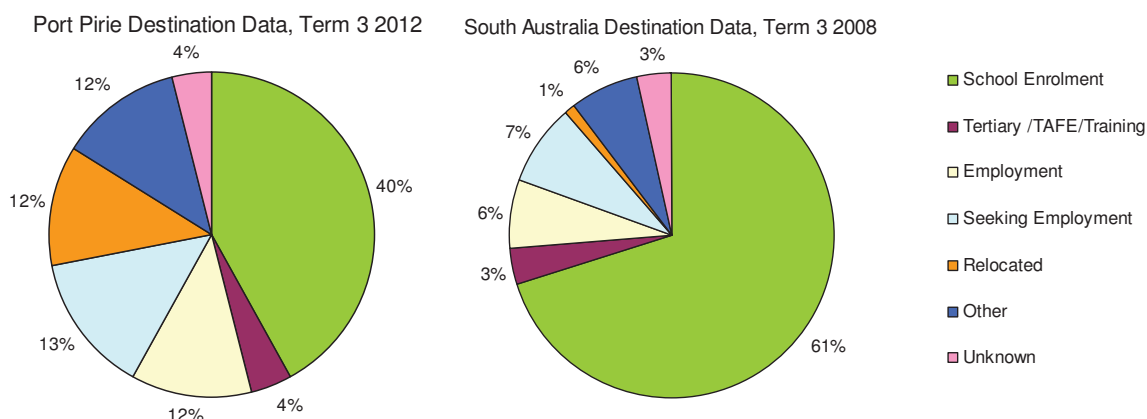
“BoysTown’s track record of re-engaging kids is very good. Anecdotally I can tell you that more kids would have positive, happy endings that come through (BoysTown) than come through any other agencies” (External stakeholder)

“One of the kids, well known for having major behavioural and anger management issues, even came in during his holidays to get his work finished and was so proud of his achievements by the end of the year” (External stakeholder)

When comparing the 2013 destination data of the Program’s students to the most recent data available for ICAN students across South Australia (2008)⁴ it is interesting to see very similar results in the proportion of young people who connect or re-connect with education, training or employment. This is despite regional areas, such as Port Pirie, representing only 23% of the State's overall data and the fact that BoysTown's program participants reside in one of the more disadvantaged areas in the State, a risk factor often linked to low levels of engagement with education and/or employment.

As shown in Figure 4, nearly 80% of students from both State and BoysTown cohorts connected or re-connected with education, training or employment at the end of their respective Term 3’s, including 77% and 71% respectively. BoysTown students show a higher proportion connecting into employment compared to the State population, who were more likely to re-connect with school. Another point of difference is the high proportion of BoysTown participants who relocated away from the area (12%), many to Adelaide, in comparison to only 1% of the State population who moved interstate.

Figure 4. ICAN student destination data, BoysTown Port Pirie compared to State-wide data



Longer-term outcomes

The relatively small size of Port Pirie's population assists in keeping abreast of the pathways taken by young people after they finish formally engaging in the Program. Many young people stay living locally in the area and are known by staff through networks, or else family and/or friends remain local to the area and know of the whereabouts and wellbeing of past participants. In addition, and as a testament to the Program and the strong relationships often forged between staff and participants, it is said to have not been uncommon over the years for past participants to themselves initiate contact with program staff, to share news about events and successes happening for them.

In a more formal approach to monitoring longer-term outcomes, FLO staff at John Pirie State High School were commissioned by the Department in 2012 to conduct a large scale tracking project on the long term destination data of all young people who had

engaged in FLO programs within the region. This project was still ongoing at the time of reporting. Drawing from preliminary data however, combined with reports from Program staff, a number of case studies were developed. These case studies provide examples of the longer term outcomes achieved by some of the young people who had enrolled in BoysTown's Flipside (block) and/or FLO Case Management programs in the few years prior to the evaluation. The findings illustrate the positive effect that the Program has had on the lives of these young participants and reinforces the strength of the long-term relationships that some young people have formed with the staff. It is hoped that in time long-term quantitative outcomes will also be available to supplement these and other case studies.

CASE STUDY 1 – Flipside client

Jason* first engaged with the Flipside Program in early 2007 when he was 15 years of age.

He was referred to the program after displaying very high levels of disengagement and truancy with mainstream education. In addition, Jason was experiencing difficulties with learning and complex family issues at home.

Jason engaged in BoysTown's Flipside Program for a little over 12 months before he returned to mainstream education in mid 2008, and remained engaged until 2009 when he completed Year 10 at the age of 17.

Jason re-engaged with BoysTown in early 2011 when he enrolled with the organisation's Job Services Support Program and an additional Literacy and Numeracy (tutoring) Program. After seven months he transitioned into paid employment with BoysTown's Intermediate Labour Market Social Enterprise Program where, in addition to gaining on-the-job training, Jason gained accreditations in Civil Construction and Horticulture (both Certificate II).

Jason has since moved on to full time employment with one of the Region's major employers, specialising in the provision of reusable pallets, containers and associated logistics services. Without BoysTown, school staff claim that Jason would probably not have transitioned into employment:

*"BoysTown was a real winner for Jason.
I never would've expected such an outcome.
It always seemed like all he wanted to do was grow up and
receive Centrelink benefit." (External stakeholder)*

* not his real name

CASE STUDY 2 – FLO Case Management client

Annah*, a young Aboriginal girl, engaged with BoysTown through the FLO Case Management program in late 2010 when she moved to the region at the age of 19. She had enrolled into Grade 10 at John Pirie State High School after a long and complicated history of moving between various schools and years of not attending school. Annah had also experienced many years of complex family issues.

Given her long break from school, Annah found it difficult to settle in to the mainstream education environment at John Pirie. She displayed major behavioural problems and faced multiple struggles in trying to conform with school rules and regulations.

Annah was enrolled in BoysTown's FLO Case Management Program and received intensive case management to support her throughout her schooling and in dealing with issues relating to her wellbeing and mental health. In addition, BoysTown provided her with support related to preparing for employment and identifying possible employment pathways.

With the support of program staff, Annah graduated from school and moved to Adelaide to start a traineeship in the Corporate Records Department of State Government. She later transitioned to a full-time position with the same employer and, most recently and with her employer's support, reduced this to part-time work so she could commence studying a Bachelor in Law. For over 12 months Annah has also travelled throughout Australia to present her life story at numerous conferences.

Annah still keeps in touch with program staff via phone, choosing to share new initiatives and successes as they occur.

"Annah had a really complex background and started as a tough cookie, but when she was given a bit of structure she just thrived. She always had really strong values in justice so it's fantastic to see her now pursuing this in a career. As I tell her because it's important she knows, she did this, not us. She was in control of her success. We were just fortunate to be able to share in the journey." (Program staff)

* not her real name

CASE STUDY 3 – FLO Case Management client

Charmaine* approached BoysTown in 2011 at the age of 18 seeking assistance in transitioning back to mainstream education. She had been disengaged for a number of years and was facing multiple barriers to re-engagement including being mother to an infant, experiencing ongoing family relationship issues and having previously experienced homelessness.

With the support of BoysTown and the school, Charmaine re-engaged with mainstream education and completed her Year 12 Certificate of Education (SACE). In 2012 she moved to Adelaide with her child and completed a Diploma in Law. She has since enrolled in university and is completing a Bachelor Degree in Education. Her daughter also commenced kindergarten this year.

“Charmaine always showed self-confidence and drive. She just needed a mentor to help keep her believing in her self.” (Program staff)

* not her real name

“These guys wouldn’t be where they are now if they hadn’t been supported by someone at BoysTown. Having worked with BoysTown, those kids were then able to actually identify their mental health issues and start seeking the help they needed” (External stakeholder)

9 STAFFING AND ADMINISTRATION

Program staff

A review of past literature highlights one critical success factor in alternative education programs is having highly skilled and qualified staff¹⁶. In particular, staff who have experience working with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and the skill to assess each young person's strengths and ensure they are able to reach their full potential³⁰. Providing clinical support to these staff members is also important, as is the need to ensure that unrealistic expectations placed on staff, particularly around requirements for them to show expertise in both teaching and student wellbeing, are cautiously monitored and managed³¹.

BoysTown's Program is delivered by three full-time staff, including a Vocational Trainer, a Vocational Trainer/Youth Worker and a Youth Worker. Unlike many programs supporting this cohort where staff turnover rates are high, the majority of Program staff have been working in the program since its fruition many years ago. This is perhaps a testament to both the staff and the support they receive. All Program staff are supported by a Clinical Practice Supervisor who provides supervision, de-briefing opportunities and training to assist in meeting best practice service delivery standards. In the 'classroom', staff are also supported by volunteer literacy and numeracy tutors. Specifically during the evaluation period, two volunteers were engaged with the program, each attending one day a week to support trainers by providing one-on-one classroom tutoring to young people as needed.

Overall, Program staff expressed support for the program's model and aims along-with immense passion for their work and the young people they supported. They did at times however, also display stress, a sense of being overwhelmed and risk of burn-out. And while the multi-skills of one staff member in particular were seen as a rare and valuable asset to the Program, it must be noted that having a staff member work across both teaching and student wellbeing places both the staff member and the Program in somewhat of a vulnerable position should anything prevent her from continuing work.

"The expertise of the Case Managers (is a key success factor). It really takes what a Youth Worker brings to the table but at the same time you just need a bit of education expertise. There are very few people who have both those skills, but BoysTown have staff that do"
(External stakeholder)

Lastly, it should be noted that the uncertainty around program future funding beyond 2014 as DECD looks to review the ICAN service delivery model, is undoubtedly taking some toll on staff's sense of job security. This long-term uncertainty for the Program is likely to also jeopardise the ability to recruit highly skilled and qualified staff for the Program should they be needed.

³⁰ Wilson, K., Stemp, K. & McGinty, S. (2011). 'Re-engaging young people with education and training: What are the alternatives', *Youth Studies Australia*, v30(4).

³¹ Brechman-Toussaint, M. & Kogler, E. (2010). *Review of international and national integrated service models for young people in the preadolescent and adolescent years: Benefits, barriers and enablers*. ARACY.

Records management

Interviews with school and government stakeholders confirmed that the BoysTown's FLO Program is highly regarded by DECD and its partnering school and is meeting its contractual requirements and standards. Staff had completed Individual Learning Plans and Goal Plans for young people where applicable, and regularly provided relevant agency stakeholders with progress reports. Reasonably high levels of compliance in internal requirements for electronically maintaining case management records in BCIMS were also evident. However, some gaps and inconsistencies did exist between the reporting of outcomes within BCIMS and other record management systems, typically due to time pressures. Additionally, more consistent and widespread conduct of BKSB follow up assessments would allow for this tool to provide a more meaningful measure of LLN progress.

Joined-up service response

In addition to working with staff and parents from the local high schools, specifically John Pirie and Gladstone State High Schools, Program staff regularly worked closely with youth support and specialist staff from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, CentreCare, Families South Australia, United Care Wesley and Centrelink to ensure young people were provided a holistic support service. In most cases, this simply included the sharing of basic client information. However, in cases where a client's needs were extreme and/or complex, this involved workers from each of the relevant services meeting to discuss and ensure joint case work.

Education and employment support and placement services were another area where Program staff worked closely with other agencies in order to help facilitate a young person's transition once they had finished Flipside or Transitions, and/or while they continued to receive FLO Case Management only services. Agencies where established relationships exist include Community Bridging Services, TAFE South Australia and BoysTown's Job Services.

Program staff also attended the Port Pirie Youth Service Network each month to discuss different training needs and events and upcoming programs available for young people e.g. MusoMagic. The network includes representatives from police, regional health support services (e.g. DOA services, CAHMS), employment support services and Aboriginal Health.

"Keeping abreast of community happenings helps to give us an upper hand in case management" (Program staff)

Overall, 'BoysTown' the brand and Program staff specifically both appear to be highly regarded within the community. One factor contributing to this is likely to be the close working relationships that Program staff maintain with other agencies, and a genuine shared interest in helping each young person. The local context and nuances of the Port Pirie region also undoubtedly played a role in facilitating these close working relationships. Both staff and external stakeholders commented on the close-knit, supportive and positive nature of the community and this was also observable to some extent simply through visiting the region.

"BoysTown have a high profile in the community now as a result of this program. There are a lot more self-referrals from young people and parents who've heard good things.....It's being seen in school and the wider community as a really viable place for kids to get good alternative learning and some great outcomes " (External stakeholder)

10 PROGRAM ENABLERS AND CHALLENGES

Program enablers

Along-with using a knowledge base of evidence to inform program design and operations, a key ingredient in effective service delivery long-term is having a shared understanding of what constitutes and influences success¹⁶. Based on existing literature and feedback from key external stakeholders, a number of factors have been identified as key enablers in the success of BoysTown's FLO Program. These are believed to have worked in conjunction with Port Pirie's unique context and nuances. Specifically, these enablers include:

- A holistic, targeted and flexible service model
- An individualised, relational approach to clients
- An emphasis on personal development skills (as well as formal skills)
- A truly collaborative partnership with the school
- Strong connections with parents, the community and local agencies
- An early intervention approach to the minimum intake age
- Engaging, diverse and purpose-built learning environments
- Stable and seamless pathways to employment and training opportunities
- Highly skilled, authentic and experienced staff who are well supported

A holistic, targeted and flexible service model: BoysTown's block-style program is unique to the region. By providing case management and alternative learning opportunities through the one service provider, young people can benefit from receiving a comprehensive suite of services and continuity in support where appropriate. In addition, splitting the block program further between Flipside and Transitions Programs based on a young person's age, learning stage and capacity has enabled BoysTown to provide even greater tailoring of the service when required. Offering tiered and multi-faceted services, cohesion between services and individualised and targeted case plans and pathways were all factors noted to be important in a recently published research paper regarding the magnitude and nature of early school leaving in Europe¹⁵.

An individualised, relational approach to clients: Having the capacity to offer in-depth and tailored assistance to each student is not a luxury typically afforded in mainstream education settings, whereas it is a marked strength of BoysTown's Program. This is enabled by the smaller class size and the support volunteer tutors. The skills and relational approach used by Program staff also facilitate restorative approaches and personal empowerment among participants. The Program's approach to clients is also in line with best-practice measures for re-connecting early school leavers with mainstream education or training¹⁵.

An emphasis on personal development skills: Not only does the Program provide a curriculum with theoretical and experiential approaches to LLN, it also places emphasis on providing students with well-rounded and transferrable personal and life skills. This includes personal skills such as building self-esteem, resilience, self-confidence and personal responsibility, as well as life skills relating to things such as managing personal

finances, information about drugs and alcohol, personal hygiene and health, interpersonal communication skills and accessing local support services. The Program's effectiveness in this area is evident in the large number of surveyed participants reporting improvements across a range of personal development factors.

A truly collaborative partnership with the school: The strong bond between BoysTown staff and participating FLO schools in the region, particularly JPSS, undoubtedly plays a strong part in the Program's success. Both Program and school staff are clearly committed to maintaining regular and active communication to ensure both organisations are working to support the other. Systems are also in place to ensure BoysTown students remain engaged with the school and its activities. Providing students such a solid and visible bridge to mainstream education can only assist in ensuring this transition pathway remains open and accessible to them should they wish to take it.

"One of the recipes of BoysTown's success is that the school stays heavily involved in the Program. These kids all get a school report, they go to sports day, they're not just outsourced, the school is still very much part of their world."

(External stakeholder)

Strong connections with parents, the community and local agencies: In addition to the staff's relationship with the school, Program staff actively work to ensure a strong connection exists between themselves and the parents of the young people involved, the community and relevant employment, training and welfare agencies. These links help to facilitate holistic service delivery and transition pathways as well as building credibility and legitimacy for the Program with participant's home environment and their local community.

An early intervention approach to the minimum intake age: While other FLO providers in the region stipulate an age range starting at 13 years or sometimes older, BoysTown supports children as young as 12 years i.e. those typically in Grade 9. Based on the significant adjustment and developmental shifts that occur during these adolescent years, intervening at this slightly earlier age is believed to influence the likelihood of successful re-integration with mainstream learning. Of the two young people who did return to mainstream education during the evaluation period, both were some of the youngest enrolled in the program.

"I've seen the Year 9's that have come out of here, they've got a fighting chance in a classroom but if you leave (an intervention) any later it's too late. I think a clear advantage of BoysTown's program is that it's targeted at kids younger than everywhere else...it gets them engaged in Year 9 when it's still possible to develop their basic learning muscles" (External stakeholder)

Engaging, diverse and purpose-built learning environments: Not dissimilar to mainstream school, the Program is fortunate to have access to a large, diverse learning facility, comprising of several different learning environments that staff can access to engage young people in applied and experiential learning activities. Specifically, the on-site learning space includes indoor and outdoor areas, access to a carpentry workshop,

kitchen, computer room, arts and crafts room, TV room and conventional classroom style learning areas. Such breadth of resources is an asset to the Program and is acknowledged as being quite a luxury for most small or medium service providers.

Stable and seamless pathways to employment and training opportunities: The Program's link to an on-site employment and workplace training service means participants have access to continuity and a stable transition pathway to employment and training opportunities as part of BoysTown's integrated approach to service delivery. In a recent review of programs reducing youth unemployment and inactivity in 16 OECD countries, including Australia, programs that offered continuity and cohesion through a "package" approach were found to be more successful³².

Highly skilled, authentic and experienced staff who are well supported: The staff's combined expertise in case management, youth work and training, particularly where it's found within the one person, is a rare and valuable asset to the Program. This is coupled with staff's genuine care and respect for the young people and a willingness to go above and beyond. The manageable case loads and the provision of clinical support also offer an effective framework for high quality service delivery and is likely to have contributed to success in this area. Additionally, BoysTown's involvement with FLO's ICAN model since the state government's initial pilot program means the organisation in general, and the same Program staff, hold a wealth of knowledge on the program's evolution and the tried and true methods. There is also a long-established relationship with the Department as the two agencies have shared both the development and design of the program.

"BoysTown is really well placed to deliver the program because it was with ICAN right at the start of ICAN's journey and that's a huge advantage. We've almost developed together, what ICAN is. It's been a mutual collaboration....and these guys are very good at what they do. They've had a huge start on things and that's one of the reasons why they're probably our best." (External stakeholder)

Program challenges

Despite its successes, the delivery of the Program is not without its challenges, most notably related to:

- Staffing vulnerability
- Resources
- Future uncertainty
- Recognised success factors

Staffing vulnerability: The staffing structure at the time of the evaluation was such that a vast amount of the Program's experience, skill and knowledge was limited to a couple of staff. One staff member in particular, was carrying a significant workload relating to both the design of the curriculum, training and case management. While it is not uncommon in small-scale programs to employ only a handful of staff, it does nonetheless put the Program in a vulnerable position in the event of staff absenteeism or resignation. Limited

³² OECD. (2010). *Off to a Good Start: Jobs for Youth*, Paris, pp. 128-129.

'back fill' opportunities at Port Pirie has meant there have been instances where the services provided to clients have had to be reduced. Additional stress is also then placed on the staff who are in attendance, increasing their risk of burn-out.

Resources: Although the Program is reasonable well resourced for something of its size, staff feedback highlighted that there are still shortcomings that impact on their ability to efficiently and effectively engage and teach young people to the best of their ability. In particular, staff felt that the IT equipment and support they were provided was inadequate - with very slow machines and internet connection often causing staff and students to feel frustrated and students to disengage. In addition, the limited hospitality equipment available to the Program was thought to be a missed opportunity, given the high level of interest in this area among students, staff are skilled in this area and able to provide training and the fact that hospitality is one industry in Port Pirie that has a lot of employment opportunities.

Future uncertainty: Notification that the funding for FLO programs will be reviewed at the end of 2013 and is likely to take on a different service delivery model has not surprisingly left staff feeling somewhat unsettled and uncertain about the future of the Program. Not least, staff are worried about what will happen to the young people they support, particularly whether they will still be able to access specialised case management support and alternative education through a model that does not require them to return to mainstream education if they are not feeling ready and able to do so. The fear is that many young people will choose to disengage from education and subsequently 'fall through the gap' if their only alternative is to return to a conventional school environment or to a TAFE learning environment, where many of them will find they do not have adequate literacy and numeracy skills to keep up.

In addition, as DECD prepare for a revision of the service model, local DECDs offices have reportedly experienced a reduction in staff numbers and a reduction in the provisions of 'exceptional circumstance' funding, both of which have had some impact on Program staff's ability to delivery services.

Recognised success factors: For some time now BoysTown has measured the less tangible impacts their programs have had on the young people engaged. This has included measures such as social networks and skills, substance abuse, criminal behaviour, physical and mental wellbeing, family relations and community involvement. While such findings are typically well received and of interest to funding bodies, there is yet to be any formal and/or wide-scale recognition that these measures should go toward measuring a Program's overall 'effectiveness', therefore limiting the view of 'effectiveness'.

11 POLICY IMPLICATIONS


The findings discussed in preceding sections highlight a number of factors that warrant consideration by policy-makers involved in the review and refunding of the ICAN program for 2014-2016 and/or other re-engagement programs for early school leavers.

One of these is the need for program providers to be able to deliver a wide range of integrated services in order to support students. There has been some discussion at a funding level about the possibility of sitting South Australia's early school leaver programs, such as FLO, back within the mainstream education setting. However, this concept raises challenges. As this evaluation highlighted, the barriers to education and the needs of many young people who have already or are at risk of disengaging early from school are often complex and multi-faceted, requiring support beyond what is currently offered through the mainstream education system. In order to support such needs, schools would be required to either resource a wide range of skills themselves or, more likely, establish and coordinate a network of agencies to support them in delivering a holistic service. Presuming a school-led program would be conducted on existing school premises, both scenarios face the challenge of encouraging early school leavers or those at high risk of disengaging to engage with a mainstream school environment - a place which, for many, is seen as a deterrent to learning. The latter scenario would also face challenges related to the time-consuming nature of establishing and maintaining strong networks with local support agencies, and the challenge of ensuring that the service provided to each young person is integrated, not fragmented and duplicated across the various areas of support.

While the precise role that mainstream educators take in the future of this program may be up for debate, what is clear from this evaluation is the value of having mainstream educators continually and actively involved in the program. Rather than a situation where the education and support of young people is simply 'outsourced' to another agency and progress updates reported back to the school periodically, this evaluation highlights the importance of establishing and maintaining a strong partnership between the school and a core service provider.

Another aspect of the program structure is the ability for the service provider to link young people to appropriate transitional pathways, be it a reconnection with mainstream education or connection to further education or employment. This evaluation would suggest that programs are most effectively placed in situations where there are services that can facilitate integrated support for young people and diverse transition pathways onto employment or further education.

The final factor for policy-makers relates to the measurement of a program's effectiveness. The common approach by policy-makers, education authorities and funders has historically been to assess the effectiveness of alternative education programs using formal measures such as attendance, literacy and numeracy scores, accreditations and education/training/employment placements. Like others reviewing



programs in this area³³, BoysTown recognises that while these measures are all valid markers of how effective a Program has been in re-engaging young people, they only partially represent the picture. Having formal and wide-scale recognition that these measures should form part of an agreed set of 'effectiveness' measures would allow for a more holistic assessment and a consistent and comparable set of agreed attainments and tools for measuring these intangible impacts.

³³ Myconos, G. (2012). *Re-engagement, training and beyond. Evaluating the second year of a community VCAL education program for young people*. Brotherhood of St Laurence.

12 CONCLUSION

This evaluation identified a range of positive impacts on the lives of the young people involved in the Program, many of which were also witnessed firsthand by staff and key stakeholders. These impacts include increases in wellbeing, self-esteem, confidence, literacy and numeracy, social ability, future goals and aspirations, re-engagement with learning and completion of accredited training modules. Such findings demonstrate that the Program is having an invaluable impact in what is recognised as being a region of significant disadvantage.

The Program's flexible learning options coupled with its highly skilled and experienced staff, delivery of individual case management and collaborative community partnerships are all factors critical to the Program's successful engagement and support of young people in helping them to re-engage with learning and prepare for transitioning onto further training and/or employment.

Although the success of the Program cannot be refuted, challenges remain for its future delivery. Most notably, these relate to the uncertain conditions regarding the State government's decisions on how the Program will be funded in the future, what adjustments will need to be made to the service model and what impacts these may have on the young people currently engaged in the Program. The vulnerability of staff and the limited resources, particularly in relation to IT, are also challenges to be addressed at an internal level.