



# YOUTHWORX MEDIA

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**YOUTH MEDIA AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE AS INTERVENTION AND INNOVATION**

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**THE DEVELOPMENT, ESTABLISHMENT AND OUTCOMES OF YOUTHWORX 2008 - 2013**

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**REPORT AUTHORS**

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Swinburne Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology**

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## YOUTHWORX: YOUTH MEDIA AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE AS INTERVENTION AND INNOVATION

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Project website and contacts at <http://cci.edu.au/projects/youthworx-20>

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## ATTRIBUTION

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# PREFACE

Youthworx is a successful model of a practical, community-based, cross-sector response to the problem of youth marginalisation and social exclusion. It combines professional expertise, networks and material resources across social service delivery agencies (**Salvation Army and Youth Development Australia (YDA)**), youth-run community media (**SYN Media**), an educational provider (**North Melbourne Institute of Technology TAFE (NMIT)**) and research organisations (the **ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI)**), at the **Swinburne Institute for Social Research (SISR)**). Media training and production is used to build capacity to re-engage with learning, education and employment. After some years in development between 2008, when Youthworx effectively began operations, and 2013, the program has provided open access multimedia workshops, accredited training and, more recently, paid traineeships for more than 400 youth disconnected from formal learning, with experience of homelessness, juvenile justice or alcohol and drug abuse. Participants broadcast and distribute their works through SYN Media, local festivals and screenings, as well as online. They also make commissioned creative products for external clients and not-for-profit organisations.

Research undertaken by Swinburne University's SISR between 2005 and 2013 explored impact of Youthworx on these young people and the broader lessons for debates on social innovation, community media and creative economies, informal learning, opportunity and enterprise. The integrated R&D is a unique element of Youthworx, allowing documentation, analysis and capacity-building. It combined longitudinal on-site research, a comparative study of best practices across parallel international youth media initiatives, and mobilisation of established academic and industry networks.

Although our findings to date have appeared in a range of publications, this document offers the first comprehensive report on the project. It discusses the development of Youthworx and the results of the 2008-13 period. The presented findings draw on a qualitative fieldwork at Youthworx and semi-structured follow-up interviews with a group of Youthworx graduates who participated in the program between 2009-2011. In combination, this material is used to document and explore the specific institutional structure and cultural context in which Youthworx's media training and production took place, the ways in which young people experienced, engaged with and valued the project, as well as the project's social outcomes.

The longitudinal account of Youthworx presented here integrates and summarises multiple voices, including industry partners, service organisations, practitioners, researchers and, importantly, young people themselves. It reflects arguments developed across the team, including material previously published.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report shows how the Youthworx project has produced a series of important outcomes:

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## COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP

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The Youthworx model provides an example of how sectors of youth development, social service delivery, education, creative industries, community media and research can be successfully linked through social enterprise, training and employment programs and partnerships between community, government and commercial agencies.

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## DIVERSITY AND FLEXIBLE PATHWAYS

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Youthworx illustrates how divergent social, diversionary, educational and commercial objectives can be successfully integrated within the pedagogic structure of a collaborative semi-formal learning environment and social enterprise.

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## MEDIA ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNING

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Our research confirms that creative media training is effective in engaging and equipping highly disadvantaged youth with skills that are interconnected, cumulative and transferable into the broader society and economy, including individual, social and vocational competences.

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## GENUINE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AND SUPPORT

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Young people identified these as a key value of the project. As noted by other studies, a nurturing social environment is a prerequisite for engagement, retention in the program, and positive individual and social transformation. The social, supportive environment is also a distinguishing factor between community-based versus the individual user-led creativity.

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## YOUTH TRANSITIONS

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The key strength of Youthworx is in providing disadvantaged youth with participatory opportunities outside of the restrictive social environments, failed mainstream education and social services they are familiar with. The captured outcomes for Youthworx graduates are important. Of 46 students enrolled in Youthworx accredited courses between 2009 and 2011, 35 obtained certification, with many students obtaining multiple certificates. 2 further students obtained VCAL diplomas while at Youthworx. More than half (25 students) have been involved in further education, ranging from accredited TAFE, VCAL courses, apprenticeships and university courses. More than one third (17 students) are known to have been employed post Youthworx. This provides strong evidence for the success of the initiative.

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## EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

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The complex vulnerability of young people's lives, affecting both the engagement in the project and beyond, makes project delivery and evaluation difficult. While we acknowledge that some outcomes may only be recognised and appreciated years later, our experience confirms the value of a situated, long-term, mixed-method approach that uses both qualitative and quantitative data to capture benefits.

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## CREATIVE INDUSTRIES AND INNOVATION

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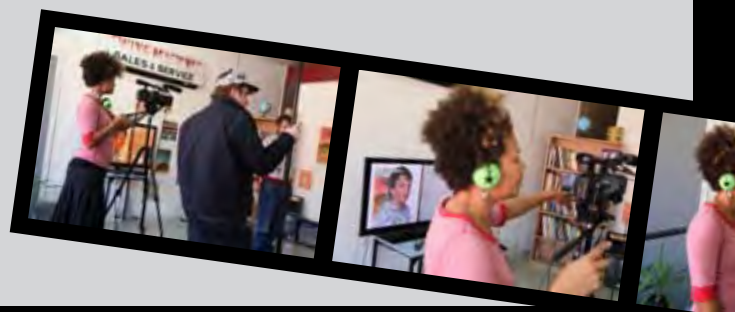
Youth development contributes to fostering media industry development through tapping into an existing market (community media and NGO sector) and providing new skills, creative content and complementary job opportunities for creative practitioners and media graduates.

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## SOCIAL INNOVATION AND ENTERPRISE

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Youthworx is a cost-effective youth media intervention that capitalises on networking material resources and professional expertise across welfare services, community and commercial media organisations, advocacy groups and educational providers, and branches of Commonwealth, state and local governments.



# INTRODUCTION

1

20-year-old Robert constantly shifts between couch-surfing with friends and transitional housing services. He has been homeless since he was 14, and school is of marginal importance in his life. Tom is 18 and shares Robert's chaotic history of unstable accommodation and interrupted education. Tom's brief summary of his life runs something like:

**I WAS KICKED OUT OF HOME AND RAN OUT, AND HAVE BEEN ON THE STREETS SINCE I WAS 10, GOING TO SCHOOL, AND THEN NOT GOING, HOME AGAIN, AND ALL THAT CRAP...**

Both were part of Youthworx, a youth media enterprise program located in Brunswick, an inner northern suburb of Melbourne. The program engages disadvantaged youth in a variety of media activities including digital storytelling, music and radio production, and film-making. Two years into the program, Robert and Tom chose to follow learning pathways offered by Youthworx. While their engagement in the program was not always consistent, they gained personal and social skills and made new friends. Tom graduated with a Certificate III qualification in creative industries, while Robert was one of the few paid trainees working on commissioned content as part of Youthworx's media business, Youthworx Productions, which commenced in mid-2010.

The life experiences of Tom and Robert are not atypical. Homelessness affects many young people in Australia and in other Western countries. They experience dysfunctional families, mental health and substance abuse issues, intermittent or incomplete schooling, violence and poverty. Every night there are young people sleeping on the streets in Australia. Between the ages of 12 and 24, there are over 30,000 homeless children and young people – some 31 per cent of the homeless population.

Governments, not-for-profit organisations and communities are at pains to find viable solutions to address the critical social problem of youth disadvantage and marginalisation (Bentley and Oakley 1999). Media training and production is one emerging front for innovation in the effort to find effective ways to assist young people re-engage with learning, the mainstream community and employment. Because media production is relevant and attractive to a diverse range of young people, it can be leveraged for skill development and positive youth transitions (Asthana 2006; Slater, Gidley et al., 2007; Tufte and Enghel 2009; Walsh, Lemon et al. 2011). And yet, the existing literature identifies insufficient understanding of on-the-ground practices and long-term social effects of media-based youth projects (Livingstone 2007; Soep and Chavez 2010; also Wordsworth, Lake et al. 2005; Belfiore 2002 on arts projects). As an R&D project, Youthworx has sought to redress this gap.

Youthworx was set up between 2000 and 2008 as a result of a policy- and practice-based convergence across the social and creative industry sectors. It is underpinned, on the one hand, by Australia's social inclusion agenda: it informs a range of social intervention, prevention and risk reduction initiatives within the field of youth development including sports, environmental or arts-based programs (Holdsworth, Lake et al. 2005). On the other, it is driven by creative industry policy: it aims to use creative media production to increase participation and knowledge bases, to propagate employment opportunities for broad sections of populations, including youth, within and beyond the creative industries (Hartley 2007; Bloustein 2008).

## YOUTHWORX RESEARCH TEAM

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**Dr Liza Hopkins (RF)**

**Chris Wilson (PhD candidate)**

**Jon Staley (Youthworx manager  
and PhD candidate)**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researchers thank all the participants: young people, Youthworx teachers and media practitioners (especially Jon Staley, David Wardell, Damien Baumgart, Robbie McEwan), youth worker Nicola Innes and the project partners: the Salvation Army (especially Craig Campbell), YDA, NMIT and SYN Media (Tahlia Azaria). Reference group members included Ann Haynes and Teresa Cusack (NMIT), Craig Campbell, Noelle DeClifford and Doug Thomas (Salvation Army), Janet Jukes (YDA), Nicole Hurtubise and Georgia Webster (SYN Media), Damian Baumgart, David Wardell, Robbie McEwan, Jon Staley (Youthworx) and SISR researchers. Interns: Laila Sakini, Bridget Sowersby, Katherine Darlington. Special thanks go also to Liza Hopkins who was part of the research team until 2010. Finally, many thanks to SISR colleagues for their valuable comments on the research findings presented at the SISR seminar in 2010.





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# REPORT DESIGN

This report presents the findings from research conducted between 2008 and 2013 covering the project's development and expansion. It draws on regular on-site participant observation and qualitative interviews with young people, staff and industry partners, as well as a set of follow-up interviews with Youthworx graduates conducted between 2012 and 2013. Findings are organised into three sections:

- **The Youthworx model:** characteristics, design and operation: How do creative industries-led approaches contribute to youth development, while linking media production to new kinds of social service delivery?
- **Participation and youth development:** How does media training and production affect individual growth and social capacity building for disadvantaged young people?
- **Significance of the Youthworx model:** What can it tell us about most effective ways of enabling youth transitions and about the social impacts of youth media enterprises in general?

The report concludes with reflections on the implications for researchers, policy makers and youth media practitioners with an interest in the scope, limits and potential of youth media enterprises.

# 2

# RESEARCH STRATEGY AND METHODOLOGY

The Swinburne CCI team has been involved with Youthworx since its inception. Initially, research focused on youth media, community radio and innovation, concentrating on SYN Media, during the period when Youthworx was being developed and built (Rennie and Thomas 2008; Rennie 2011). We then conducted intensive fieldwork at the Tinning St Youthworx site, including regular participant observation, interviews and informal conversations with young people and staff. This situated ethnographic study enabled the researchers to engage with a wide range of experience and reflection as the initiative changed.

**SUCH AN APPROACH, AS BORN (2004) POINTS OUT, MAKES IT POSSIBLE TO FOCUS ON 'DIVISIONS, BOUNDARIES AND CONFLICTS', ON 'THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WHAT IS SAID IN PUBLICITY ... AND WHAT HAPPENS ON THE GROUND ... THE GAPS BETWEEN PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE ... BETWEEN WHAT IS EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT'.**

In addition to capturing definite outcomes – completed courses and jobs found – our emphasis centred on recording the processes taking place on site, and the shifting rationales and reflections of protagonists (see also Belfiore 2002). Intensive in-situ observational fieldwork is crucial to tap into these moments of lived experiences while young people are engaged in media projects. The value of practice-based research is also in recording and analysing media production processes. Practitioners are often pressed for time engaging in hands-on practice and fulfilling their different roles. They don't necessarily have time to reflect on what they often do instinctively. We therefore worked closely with Youthworx staff and trainers. Project Manager, Jon Staley, became involved in the research himself, as a reflective practitioner and researcher in training.

While it is not discussed in detail in this report, the question of methodology and representation has been an important consideration guiding our research project. Working with young people poses a series of ethical issues recognised across the literature (e.g. Huesca 2009) that need to be addressed throughout the research. As part of the ethical requirements, clear induction mechanisms were set in place to inform Youthworx media staff and participants of the nature of the research project. Youth Development Australia (YDA), which is responsible for the project's operation, oversees pre-enrolment interviews and simple questionnaires to gather basic information about participants' background circumstances (age, where they live, what social service organisation they are part of, level of media literacy, and expectations of the project). At this stage, young people are also informed about the research component integrated in the project's structure. Between 2008 and 2010, the researchers conducted induction sessions at the beginning of each school semester to outline research objectives, methods and the nature of young people's involvement. Overall, it was made clear that participation in the research project was voluntary, with no consequences for their involvement or assessment in the course. Before interviews, informed consent was sought from all participants, overseen by YDA staff. The research was designed to ensure privacy and confidentiality.



Regular participant observation was complemented by formal in-depth interviews as well as informal conversations with young people and staff. Young people were asked about their involvement in the program: their motivation, learning practices, values derived in the process and future plans beyond Youthworx. Staff were asked to reflect on their own involvement in the project, teaching/training practice, challenges that the program faces and opportunities it fosters. As participant-observers, the researchers were involved in on-site media production, occasionally asked to act as interviewees for young people's creative projects or production assistants on film shoots. They accompanied young people to radio station SYN and public screening events across Melbourne. The longitudinal, situated nature of the research provided the opportunity to expand on, clarify or revisit comments and observations made previously (on value of ethnographic approach, see e.g. Slater, Gidley et al., 2007: 25; Boellstorff 2008). Regular staff meetings with social workers and media facilitators were highly productive in establishing good working relationships between media facilitators and researchers and also in gaining additional and updated information on young people's engagement in the project, group dynamic, individual progress in the class and life circumstances outside Youthworx. This background information was important in raising awareness of sensitive issues and potential risks for researchers and staff. The relationships between Youthworx staff and researchers were also important for maintaining communication with students after they left the project, as well as for ascertaining the transition pathways of some students when researchers were unable to make direct contact.

We also note that the responsibility to maintain young people's privacy can be tricky because of cross-referencing: researchers are bound by university ethics guidelines to use pseudonyms in their publications. At the same time, students' creative works are available on the Youthworx website under their real names. The works are also shown publicly at festivals and conferences using their real names with their consent, and indeed with a sense of achievement and pride. Young people often personally announce their media work publicly and have been open about their participation in Youthworx in these contexts. In this report, as in other academic publications, we have chosen to use pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity. However, we acknowledge the importance of crediting young people with agency and with authorship in their work, as Soep and Chavez (2010) observe, which is ultimately an important goal of projects such as Youthworx.

This report draws on research conducted between 2008 and 2013, including ethnographic study and a series of follow-up interviews with a group of Youthworx graduates who were officially enrolled in Youthworx's accredited courses in Creative Industries between 2009 and 2011. Between 2008 and 2010 we conducted regular participant observation and formal and informal interviews with young people participating in the program, mostly at the Youthworx creative studio. Between 2010 and 2013 we continued the research through visits at the project site, complemented by the follow-up interviews conducted between 2012 and 2013. The analysis of the interview transcripts and fieldnotes generated a number of themes presented in this report such as a perceived difference between mainstream schooling and learning experience at Youthworx, and additional material about youth transitions and outcomes. Our understanding of impact and outcomes in this sector integrates mixed methods and builds on previous evaluation studies, especially Slater, Gidley et al., 2007 call for qualitative, long-term assessment. This model assumes non-linear life changes, diverse and flexible pathways which, although difficult to track, are nonetheless essential to a more nuanced assessment of youth media programs' actual efficacy.

While our research has drawn on multiple sources of research material, we recognise the partiality of our findings, particularly in relation to our ethnographic research and follow-up interviews. Firstly, the key research engagement at one cultural site (Youthworx studio) cannot reveal the entire host of young participants' social worlds, experiences and transformations, especially since the project is one of many influences in their lives (on limitations of ethnographic approach see e.g. Boellstorff 2008: 30; 60-86; on limitations of qualitative evaluation research see e.g. Holdsworth, Lane et al. 2005: 21; or tracking 'distance travelled' in this area of practice see Slater, Gidley et al., 2007). To give an account of young people's engagement, experiences and transitions is very important, and was our key research focus. However, we note that what they report at various stages of the research is, unsurprisingly, likely to change, including their ideas about what they want to be and how their opportunities and skills can be best translated into life and work outside Youthworx. Secondly, young people, after leaving the project, are difficult to track. Out of 45 former students contacted, we managed to interview 17; 11 were uncontactable due to either disconnected numbers or phones ringing out. A few students appear to have completely fallen through the cracks. We addressed this in part by seeking information from youth agencies that had either first or second-hand knowledge of some former students' circumstances. For the longitudinal research of this kind, we also note a significant time variation amongst the interviewees in terms of time that passed since their participation in the program, ranging between 3 years and several months. Finally, we accept that some outcomes of the program may only be captured years later (Slater, Gidley et al., 2007), while some may never be articulated in an easily recognisable form or shape. However, our research confirms the value of long-term qualitative research that can produce a better understanding of the complexity and ultimately the potential of media-based interventions for social change. In combination with quantitative indicators such as the number of completed courses, transitions into formalised education and employment after the program, it provides strong evidence for the success of Youthworx. As we demonstrate, our qualitative findings from this Australian case study are consistent with parallel work conducted into youth media projects in the UK (Slater, Gidley et al., 2007), especially in relation to the wide-ranging appeal of media education, pedagogical flexibility of youth media programs and the development of interconnected, transferrable skills.

# KEY FINDINGS

## THE YOUTHWORX MODEL: CHARACTERISTICS, DESIGN AND OPERATION

### *Collaborative cross-sector partnership*

The model is based on a successful, deliberate but flexible partnership between youth development and social service agencies, educational and research providers, creative industries (including commercial agencies) and community media. It is a unique and potentially transferable example of how these sectors can be effectively linked to offer a networked response to the complex issues of youth disadvantage by providing an array of social enterprise, training and employment programs. The integrated R&D program provides a nuanced documentation and analysis of on-the-ground processes, social outcomes and the broader state of the sector to inform the project's practice and future directions.

### *Participatory culture and flexible, integrated approach*

The organisational values combine a focus on supportive community (including professional social work) and creativity-led skill formation (including professional media expertise). Self-expression and competence development are enabled through tailored and gradual media training and production in a guided and collaborative context of semi-formal learning. Flexible learning pathways accommodate young people's diverse interests, levels of literacy, needs and aspirations, and progress from easy, fun-based creative activities such as digital storytelling or music recording to real-world media (via SYN) and commercially viable production (via Youthworx Productions). This pedagogic structure is built into the competence-based accredited courses in Creative Industries (Media) (offered since 2009) and paid traineeships (offered since 2010).

### *Youth development and social enterprise*

Despite its success, the model contains structural tensions between two sets of imperatives: youth development and co-creative pedagogy, and a sustainable social enterprise and viable production initiative, well-recognised in youth media practice and scholarship (Ito, Baumer et al. 2009). Youthworx provides a convincing Australian example of how the tensions between intending to simultaneously work with any disengaged young person while developing a self-funded media enterprise recognised for high-quality media products can be managed in practice, as the program evolves.

## PARTICIPATION AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

### *Media as a driver of multi-faceted youth development*

The research demonstrates that the Youthworx initiative is significant and, positive. It has been successful in attracting highly disengaged young people, involving them in a range of tailored development pathways such as open access, accredited courses and paid traineeships. Between 2008 and 2013 over 400 young people participated in Youthworx Media as part of informal group-based workshops and one-on-one training sessions. Between 2009-2011, 46 students officially enrolled in accredited courses in Creative Industries, and 35 of them graduated with Youthworx certifications. Collaborative learning and media production equips young people with individual, social and vocational skills, and helps them develop personal agency and social networks (see also Walsh, Lemon et al. 2011). Importantly, these skills are interconnected, accumulative and transferable (Slater, Gidley et al., 2007). For example, 'soft' skills such as communication competence can support the learning process when new technical skills are being acquired. The ability to effectively receive and act on feedback from trainers and peers in a media production setting may later be applied into other vocational, social and personal contexts.

### *The focus on processes of social engagement*

One of the distinctive characteristics of Youthworx identified by participants relates to its focus on the process of engagement with youth, underpinned by genuine human relations, a finding reflected in the UK study by Slater, Gidley et al., (2007). This is contrasted with bureaucratic, outcome-oriented, client-service provider dynamic ascribed to mainstream schooling or social services. The purposefully orchestrated 'culture of belonging and production' alongside the flexible organisational structure, is the basis of Youthworx's success. The success is interpreted qualitatively as experienced and valued by the project's main stakeholders – young people, and further reinforced by their positive, if uneasy, integration into the broader society and economy post Youthworx. A clear implication for educational and social youth providers is the importance of a multi-dimensional supportive context to foster participation, continuity in the program and transformation through a combination of creative, semi-formal education and practical youthwork service (also Slater, Gidley et al., 2007). However, this 'culture of belonging' is never static. It is shaped by the changing social and institutional formation affected by turn-overs of young participants and staff, a constant, often difficult negotiation of relationships between students and adult practitioners, and organisational transformations (e.g. the development of the social enterprise). These dynamic social relationships were identified by staff as shifting between being a teacher, mentor, counsellor and a friend to young people – the roles that can be experienced by an embedded researcher as well.

# 4

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE YOUTHWORX MODEL

### Youth transitions

The strength of a youth media enterprise such as Youthworx is that it provides a range of personal and social learning opportunities, nurturing the capacity for young people to recognise and work with their own potential – or talent (Hartley 2007) – within a supportive environment and, importantly, outside the familiar environments of low socio-economic status and dysfunction (Leadbeater and Wong 2009). The skills-set that young people gain from media production are adaptive and transferable to other personal and professional contexts, even if not necessarily directly utilised in media industries (see also Slater, Gidley et al., 2007: 36). It should be noted that facilitating youth transitions into creative industries education and employment beyond Youthworx is not the program's chief objective. Instead, Youthworx's role is framed as a contribution to general skill development, which, as illustrated below, is strong and highly promising.

35 students of 45 officially enrolled graduated with Youthworx certifications. Many obtained multiple certifications during their involvement in the program. Importantly, of the whole group of 46, more than half (25 students) continued with some type of education and training after leaving Youthworx, including apprenticeships, TAFE, VCAL and tertiary courses (see Table 1).

Table 1: Types of education and training across apprenticeships, TAFE and VCAL courses following Youthworx

| TYPES OF EDUCATION |                              |
|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Bakery             | Boiler making                |
| Childcare          | Disability Training          |
| Forklift           | Graphic design               |
| Hospitality        | Instrument making and repair |
| Landscaping        | Mechanic                     |
| Media / Arts       | Photography                  |
| Personal training  | Rendering                    |
| Retail             | Social work                  |
| Screen Writing     | Warehousing                  |

Of 46, 17 have been employed in a variety of jobs since the program, across various industry sectors (see Table 2). 4 Youthworx graduates were in creative occupation employment at the time of follow-up interviews (2012/2013), including filming, editing, photography and guitar making. 2 were working as freelancers in cultural production, 1 as a full-time employer at a prestigious guitar manufacturing company and performing live music at a casual basis, 1 part-time at a jeweller's shop while attending a university course in media production.

In addition, Youthworx Productions has offered, since mid 2010, a range of full-time and part-time paid traineeships to over 20 young people employed to assist with filming, editing and web-design on externally commissioned media projects.

Table 2: Employment following Youthworx

| CREATIVE INDUSTRIES EMPLOYMENT |                     |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| Editing                        | Film making         |
| Guitar making                  | Jewellers           |
| Photography                    |                     |
| OTHER EMPLOYMENT               |                     |
| Car wreckage                   | Community centre    |
| Diesel mechanic                | Disability services |
| Equipment hire                 | Events organising   |
| Factory/warehouse              | Hospitality         |
| Landscaping                    | Rendering           |
| Retail                         | School support      |
| Beauty professional            | Painting            |

### Time and resources are critical

Sustained interpersonal relationships and material resources are required in the process. Plotting new learning pathways, to make training and job creation programs sustainable, and to start generating educational and entrepreneurial outcomes, takes time. So too does quality content development that requires technical sophistication (see also Belfiore 2002: 100) and a well-resourced educational environment to enable those committed to work in the creative industries to transition from fun-based, amateur to professional (and paid) production.

### Intervention

Social innovation programs such as Youthworx offer a sustained example of cost-effective, media-focused youth development intervention into complex social problems. They help governments save money by diverting 'youth at risk' from lock-ups and prisons (Mulgan 2008), while averting the social and economic cost associated with the impact over time that these young people's incarceration and potential recidivism may have on siblings, parents, friends and communities (Campbell 2010).

### *Creative industries and innovation*

The Youthworx model shows that while media can harness young people's creative potential for their personal development, there is reciprocal gain for industry. Young people can contribute directly to media industry development, offering new skills, fresh insights and content, while opening new markets (see also Hartley 2007), e.g. through producing content for other NGOs and community media. Youthworx has engaged in content creation for niche markets: SYN Media and community TV Channel 31, small-scale distribution via locally-based public festivals and screenings, and online production.

Youthworx has succeeded in establishing a small-scale creative industry enterprise, Youthworx Productions, which taps into an existing (peripheral) market. It develops through content procurement educational, promotional or advocacy media material relating broadly to the theme of social inclusion. Youthworx contributes also to the creative education sector: it runs creative workshops on a contract, for-fee basis (especially digital storytelling), and offers work placements for public and NGO sector media graduates, e.g. Swinburne University of Technology and Open Channel.

### *Linking community media, social services and social enterprise*

At Youthworx, co-creative pedagogy and personal self-realisation are linked to professional standards and strong distribution networks. These links help to change young people's lives, but they also work in the public interest. Youthworx connects and facilitates the work of community and commercial media organisations, advocacy and welfare groups and branches of Commonwealth, state and local government.

The partnership with Youthworx has allowed SYN Media, for example, to establish lasting connections with hard-to-reach youth, and to diversify both its voluntary base and its community media content. In exchange for media mentoring for Youthworx participants, SYN volunteers were able to receive financial support to produce a TV series for Channel 31 as part of Youthworx' job funding. Youthworx offers SYN a real connection to niche audiences, peripheral markets and social enterprise.

### *Linking creative industry to education and employment opportunity*

Youthworx promotes educational innovation by adapting the apprenticeship models of creative industries' small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to the needs of marginalised youth. It shows that industry experts, supported by teachers and social workers, can play an important function in skill-transfer and work training. Unlike short and expensive media courses offered by Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS) or Open Channel, young people at Youthworx can learn hands-on by working collaboratively on real-world projects over longer time. Youth development programs also provide complementary job opportunities for those already working in the creative sector. Youthworx's contractual teaching staff are at the same time active freelance media producers who are both sustaining their professional practice and opening themselves to new creative experiences, thus the social service sector links to creative industries in a network of skill-building.

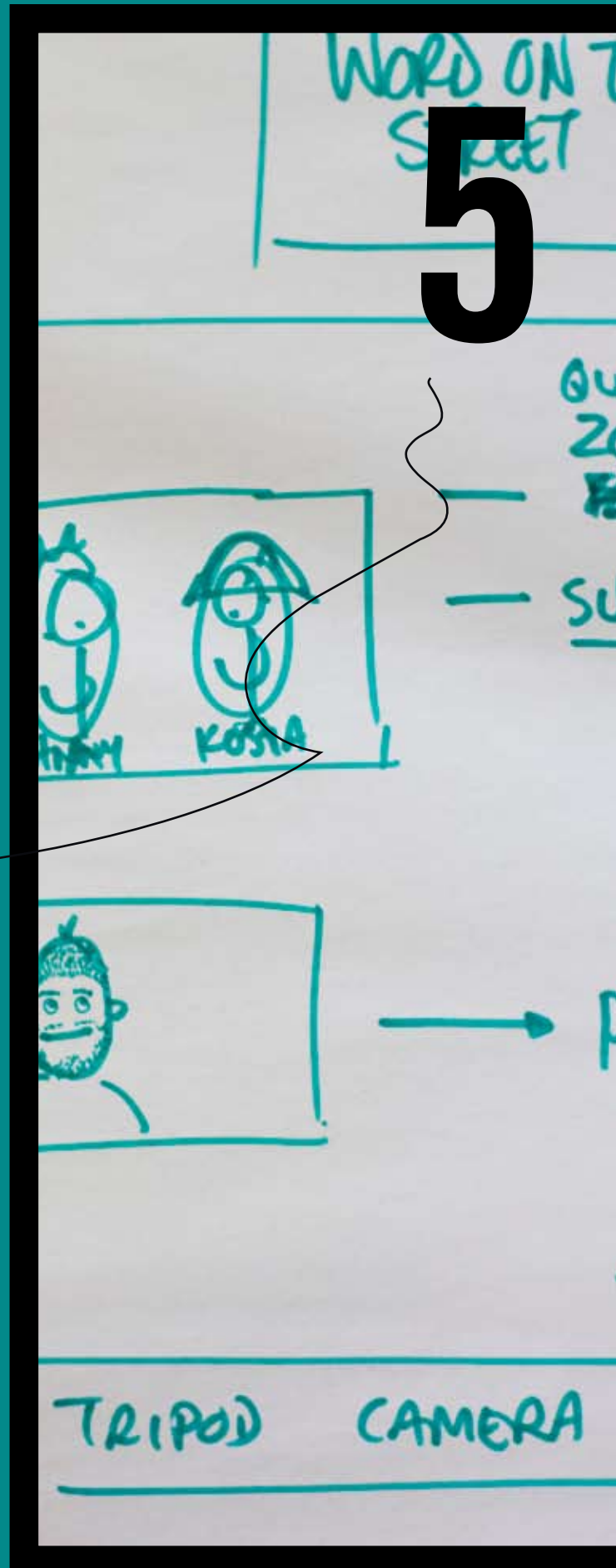
# EXTENDED FINDINGS

## YOUTHWORX: A SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Youthworx is an integrated research and development initiative hosted by non-profit agency Youth Development Australia (YDA) in partnership with the Salvation Army, SYN Media, NMIT, Swinburne University and the ARC Centre of Excellence in Creative Industries and Innovation, with funding support from the Victorian and Commonwealth governments. It offers marginalised young people access to media production facilities, accredited training, a semi-structured environment of real-world learning, the opportunity to broadcast live to peers and to reach multiple audiences, an opportunity for re-learning how to learn, and the first steps on multiple pathways to new social and vocational destinations.

Youthworx participants co-create and distribute creative work through SYN Media, local public festivals and events, and occasionally through online platforms such as YouTube. They also produce work for external clients and funding organisations. They have the option of participating in short media courses and in accredited training, following pathways to employment integrated in the project and beyond.

Since 2010, Youthworx has been supplemented by Youthworx Productions, underpinned by government funding for job creation, which makes commissioned products for the government and not-for-profit sector, employing Youthworx graduates as interns and trainers. Youthworx therefore combines a youth development and accredited media training wing with a social enterprise and burgeoning small business linked to employment and training programs.





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## LOCATION AND STRUCTURE

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Youthworx's physical home is in Tinning St, Brunswick, an inner suburb north of Melbourne's CBD. Its studio, run by YDA, is in a converted warehouse that contains a purpose-built industry-standard recording studio. Its three-room creative space is fitted with new Macintosh computers and high-tech video equipment. In this space, marginalised young people have access to a well-equipped educational and creative community hub, to accredited training opportunities (open-access training workshop, accredited courses) and to support and counselling. Working with media trainers, young people learn how to plan and make mini-documentaries, short films and original music. They practise planning and recording short radio sequences. Distribution outlets include SYN Media which has a connection to Channel 31. Once a week, Youthworx participants travel to the SYN Media studio and broadcast live.

Youthworx is a supportive learning environment. The Salvation Army's Crossroads and Brunswick Youth Services provide add-on case management and youth worker support, as in-kind support. Disadvantaged young people are referred to Youthworx from local social agencies Brunswick Youth Services (located across the road in Tinning St), Crossroads, DHS, MacKillop Family Services, Mission Australia, Juvenile Justice, Wesley Employment Services and NMIT. The screening process for entry involves an hour-long interview whereby the young person is assessed in relation to their eligibility for the courses that are accredited through NMIT. Youthworx maintains regular contact with case workers, linking all eligible students (15 to 19 years old) into Brunswick Youth Services support.

Once they enter Youthworx, either for short courses or for longer accredited training programs, young people also have access to media facilitators and teachers, e.g. in 2010, training staff included two freelance documentary filmmakers, a drama graduate with film-making experience, a fine arts graduate enrolled in an animation course and two radio producers who worked at SBS. Media industry experts work on a casual basis as trainers, and Swinburne media students and graduates also work at the site on work placement, as interns or voluntarily, e.g. in marketing. A Swinburne/CCI team is involved in the on-site participatory research.



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## HISTORY AND TIMELINE

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Youthworx was set up to address the complex linked problems of homeless and marginalised young people and initially grew from new trends in the field of youth development. It combines a social partnership between social, educational and media with government support to offer a practical solution to complex problems of youth disadvantage. The initiative focuses on social inclusion and integrated social service delivery but adds an unusual element of social enterprise, drawing on the resources of the creative industries and on the participatory 'open-source' institutional culture of community media. It supplements the traditional developmental focus on providing material resources in the form of 'food and shelter' with an emphasis on the higher levels of the Maslow hierarchy of needs – aesthetics and social connectedness.

One of the distinctive features of Youthworx is the way in which it works across and between the policy paradigms of social inclusion and creative industries, as the following brief history of its emergence shows. Working at the intersection of social service provision and creative industries, it shows the value of innovative, flexible, networked approaches to social problems.

### *Youthworx as youth-led community media*

The original concept of Youthworx was developed by David MacKenzie (now at the Swinburne Institute) and Leigh Burton (now with the Children's Television Foundation). Their work built on a series of small-scale radio trials conducted between 2000 and 2003. Disadvantaged young people were encouraged to participate in *Sounds of the Street*, a pilot radio project coordinated by RMIT University and the City of Whittlesea, in partnership with a then aspirant community broadcaster, the Student Youth Network (SYN). A success story of one young participant who won a national Youth Media Award and later re-enrolled into an education course showed that it was possible to reconnect disadvantaged young people with education and training, via creative radio production. In turn, this helped build support for SYN's successful community radio licence bid. In 2003-05, following SYN's first year of broadcasting, MacKenzie went on to established YDA, a not-for-profit charitable organisation operating around the tenet of a platform for change. The major change strategy is the national Youth Commission model supplemented by think-tanks and youth issues-oriented conferencing. Youthworx is YDA's primary youth program that works directly with disadvantaged young people. A foundational basis for Youthworx was a core and continuing partnership with the Salvation Army which became the main sponsor of the project between 2006-08. Through its Swinburne node, the ARC Centre of Excellence in Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI) became a research and development partner, in order to document Youthworx's establishment and effects, in partnership with SYN, YDA and the Salvation Army.

Between 2005 and 2008, the partnership with a specific Salvation Army corps was established and consolidated, a training and production site found and fitted out, and the foundation staff were employed. During this phase, CCI researchers worked closely with SYN, YDA and the Salvation Army, investigating current and potential connections between community media, creative industries, innovation and opportunity (Rennie and Thomas 2008; Rennie 2011).

Youthworx commenced effective operation in 2008 with significant organisational, social work and recruitment support from Brunswick Youth Services. Participants were given access to SYN's volunteer-run radio training sessions and one-hour weekly radio time slot. At the beginning of 2009, a more formal educational program was put in place, linking Youthworx with the NMIT youth unit, through the involvement of Jon Staley who held dual roles as NMIT media teacher and Youthworx manager while also embarking on doctoral work at Swinburne reflecting as a practitioner on the pedagogic and creative challenges of working with marginalised young people. Through the NMIT partnership, Youthworx was able to build accredited qualification into its programs, significantly expanding its educational services. Through the link to Swinburne, research became central to the initiative.

### *Research and development*

Swinburne SISR became involved in research on Youthworx as a CCI Melbourne research node. The study proceeded with research into Youthworx's key industry partner, SYN Media.

Phase 1 (2005-08) of the research investigated youth-run community media and their capacity for innovation. Phase 2 (2008-10) evaluated Youthworx's models of media participation as an intervention in young people's life paths, drawing on interviews and ethnographic observation. Research Fellows have been Dr Ellie Rennie, Dr Liza Hopkins and Dr Aneta Podkalicka. Two PhD projects conducted as part of the research are APAL Chris Wilson on youth radio and Jon Staley on youth media pedagogy.

In Phase 2 (2008-10), the core research emphasis was on an ethnography-based qualitative study conducted at the Youthworx studio. Dr Podkalicka and Dr Hopkins were the main researchers conducting the fieldwork throughout all stages of Youthworx's development and implementation. Swinburne researchers helped to set up the studio space, visited the site regularly and attended arts/media events where participants were involved or had their works featured.

In Phase 3 (2011-2013) the researchers continued with visits at the Youthworx site, tracking youth transitions and the program development. A series of semi-structured interviews conducted between 2012 and 2013 with Youthworx graduates was an important component of this phase. Additionally, the research included a comparison of international youth media initiatives, particularly a large-scale Digital Connectors program run by a not-for-profit organisation One Economy in the US.

### *Social enterprise and sustainability*

In June 2010, YDA established a small-scale creative industry enterprise, Youthworx Productions. This media business was designed as a work experience and employment pathway for young trainees from the Youthworx program. It develops educational, promotional or advocacy media material relating broadly to the theme of social inclusion through content procurement and contributes to the creative education sector by running creative workshops on a contract for-fee basis and offering work placements for public and NGO sector media graduates. Since 2010, Youthworx Productions has engaged in content creation for niche markets SYN Media and Channel 31, small-scale distribution via local public festivals and screenings, and online. It has produced a number of commissioned works that represent a mix of advocacy and promotional material. Unlike the short and expensive media courses offered by AFTRS or Open Channel, young people can learn hands-on by working collaboratively on real-world projects.

# THE YOUTHWORX MODEL

## YOUTHWORX TRAINING PROGRAM

Learning and teaching at Youthworx happens in small groups, often on a one-on-one basis. Highly trained creative industry professionals teach and mentor the young people involved. Youthworx has sought to move beyond community-based arts programs organised around the value of self-expression as a form of therapy or making creative works for their own sake. Although it does encourage self-representation by inviting young people to choose how they want to represent themselves and what creative choices to make, media practice at Youthworx is collaborative and geared towards skill-formation. Even in digital storytelling, as a relatively simple practice, aimed mostly at friends or family, participants are encouraged to think about quality production and notions of audience. They are shown other examples of digital stories and made aware that their creative 'monologues' (as they are called at Youthworx) will be shown at a public screening. Media training and production conducted in collaboration with SYN Media offers a context for a more structured, demanding and responsible mode of engagement, media education and work. This process is supported by media distribution network Channel 31, and increasingly by NGO and government commissions.

The Youthworx program offers an array of training opportunities for participants depending on their individual interests, aspirations and literary levels. They range from supported media practices to accredited courses in Creative Industries (Media) and industry training within the social enterprise Youthworx Productions, as outlined below.

### Independent media training

Young people come in to create a simple media work through independent one-on-one media support (10 sessions) by Youthworx trainers. They may utilise a short format of a two to three minute digital story about themselves, something they are interested in or care about. Alternatively, they might produce a rap song, writing their own rhymes, composing music, recording in the Youthworx radio studio, and making a digital copy burnt on a CD, uploaded on YouTube, used as a mobile phone ring tone or played on SYN (if they continue).

Between 2008 and 2013, Youthworx worked with over 400 young people, including via open access programs. These included radio and film workshops for participants from:

- Ladder Project (AFL)
- Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education (PRACE) Connections
- SpiritWest (FRESH)
- NMIT VCAL
- Melton Youth Support.

### Workshop-based media training

Youthworx offers a range of workshops including Basic Radio Production, a free one-off session for targeted groups to experience the thrill and challenge of putting together a 'mini radio show' with the help of a SYN trainer. Other sessions/workshop programs are increasingly offered as fee-paid services by Youthworx Productions. Young people learn about radio and video production, including a series of technical and content production skills for radio segments or digital stories. They also have an opportunity to 'lease' Youthworx's one-hour weekly time-slot on SYN to produce their own shows.

Youthworx has run a number of workshop programs for organisations including:

- CHRIPS (Centre for the Human Rights of Imprisoned People): Digital storytelling program for women reflecting on the experience of incarceration
- FRESH: Digital storytelling program for VCAL students enrolled at SpiritWest
- Melton Youth Project: Digital storytelling project on the experience of being 'queer'
- PRACE Connections: Students participated in a basic radio training program and then did a number of 'live to air' slots at SYN.

Young people who have participated in either the independent media training or group workshops sometimes enrol into Youthworx accredited training which is delivered in partnership with NMIT.

Accredited training

- Certificate I in Creative Industries (Media)
- Certificate II in Creative Industries (Media)
- Certificate III in Media

Around 15 young people are enrolled each semester across three levels of accredited training in Creative Industries (Media). Courses are run three days a week, following a flexible approach. Participants start with producing short digital stories, called monologues, and move on to work on more collaborative mini-documentaries or short films. Examples of collaborative works include *Spawn of Evil*, based on an original film script and filmed by Youthworx participants. Later, the short film was screened and a background 'making of' piece documenting its production was screened on Channel 31. All of the projects are designed to give students practical hands-on experience and cover these core aspects of media creation:

- Camera use and cinematography
- On-air presentation
- Post-production
- Research
- Creative thinking
- Industry context
- OH & S
- Workplace effectiveness.



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Students are assessed on a competency basis in relation to the practical skills required. Between 2009 and 2012, Youthworx achieved the following accredited outcomes (see Table 3):

| OUTCOMES     | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | TOTAL |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Certificates | 15   | 18   | 19   | 17   | 69    |

## Youthworx Productions

With the commencement of Youthworx Productions in 2010, three paid traineeship positions were created and the students have been enrolled in a Certificate IV in IT Multi-Media at Swinburne TAFE (Hawthorn campus). Trainees were initially on a part-time contract (15 hours per week) spread over three five-hour days (Wednesday, Thursday and Friday). Given, however, that there has been quite a high volume of work, the trainees were regularly working a four-day week including some out of hours and weekend film shoots. The core trainees also worked as crew on the 'Warrima' shoot in Kuranda (Far North Queensland) in 2010. In addition to their regular production work, trainees are required to attend one day a month on campus at Swinburne and are given regular time at work to complete assessment tasks, with the support of Youthworx staff.

Table 4: Youthworx Productions' young employees and staff until 2012

| STAFF                                 | 2012 | TOTAL |
|---------------------------------------|------|-------|
| Core staff                            | 3    | 6     |
| Core trainees                         | 3    | 6     |
| Contracted industry professionals     | -    | 20    |
| Paid trainee assistants               | -    | 24    |
| Internships (through work placements) | -    | 6     |



This section focuses on young people's perspectives and experiences of Youthworx. It uses a number of indicators, and integrates research material from the ethnographic research and follow-up interviews with Youthworx graduates to illustrate the transitions that participants have made, what has worked for them in terms of individual, social and vocational outcomes, and what problems have been encountered in the process. Young people's accounts and our participant observations provide strong evidence about the value of alternatives to formal schooling, and how access to supported guided media training and production can assist marginalised young people in skill development and inclusion into the broader society and economy.

An important learning is that the project is driven by expanded individual, social and vocational aims, which reflects and capitalises on the social partnership nature of the project that seeks to address the complex, multidimensional needs of the disenfranchised demographics that it services. Youthworx staff come from different professional backgrounds and translate their expertise and work experience into its model and operation. Similarly, young people who join the project share the experience of disengagement but possess different interests, needs and ambitions. Youth media enterprises such as Youthworx are best considered as an amalgam of multiple interrelated developmental aims that include 'learning to learn' philosophy, self-expressive and vocational skill-building, or assisting young people to 'think a bit further ahead', as one participant put it.

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## PATHWAYS

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As we have noted, many participants have responded very positively to development pathways offered by the project. A few enrolled in Youthworx's accredited courses after an initial open-access training. Many who enrolled in Certificate I stayed on through Certificates II and III. Paid trainees with Youthworx Productions had previously completed Certificates I, II and III. Their success is reflected in the progress they have made and the high quality of work delivered to their clients.

A number of spectacular transformations have been recorded. For example, 19-year-old Darren arrived at Youthworx highly disengaged, with strong anxieties about learning from his past experiences in formal schools. He had also experienced unstable accommodation and his relationship with his family was challenging. While on the project, Darren began to open up, actively engaging in music and radio production. After a semester at Youthworx (before it provided its own accredited courses), Darren enrolled in a TAFE course in music production. He had graduated with a diploma, came back to mentor other Youthworx participants in guitar playing, and has been full-time employed in a sought-after position for the last two years.

While most Youthworx participants express strong dissatisfaction with mainstream schooling, resulting in early school leaving between Years 7 and 11, they all share a desire and sometimes almost nostalgia for learning and good schools. The story of 18-year-old Lucas is illustrative. He had been expelled and moved schools three times before his relative talked him into 'giving it a go' at Youthworx. After several months in the program, and a series of enjoyable radio programs he co-produced and co-hosted at SYN, he eventually quit Youthworx too. Before he proudly moved on to take up an apprenticeship at a mechanic's, he insisted:

**THE WAY I LOOK AT IT, IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT SCHOOL YOU'RE AT; IF YOU WANT TO LEARN, YOU'LL LEARN. AND I LIKE TO LEARN, I DID LEARN, LIKE I WAS PRETTY GOOD, IT'S JUST LIKE ... I DON'T KNOW, I JUST GOT CAUGHT UP WITH BAD CROWDS AND I WAS SORT OF LIKE THE BAD KID. BUT I WISH I COULD GO BACK TO MY FIRST SCHOOL AND STILL BE THERE. LIKE I'D GO BACK, I'D DO ANYTHING TO GO BACK, BUT TIMES CHANGED AND I CAN'T DO NOTHING NOW. IT'S HAPPENED.**

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## MOTIVATION

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Overall, young people join Youthworx for a variety of reasons, but motivation patterns change with new cohorts and over time. For example, based on the fieldwork, we observed that youth participation at the early stages of the project had been motivated more by sociality than media skill-based development prospects, with participants' noting that they joined just to kill time', 'not wanting to stay at home anymore', or 'because their friends told them so'. Motivations for joining shifted as the project matured. Of the 46 enrolled in the accredited courses between 2009-2011, almost all declared their interest to be in media, including interest in employment in the creative industries (see Podkalicka forthcoming for detailed analysis).

Popular media-related occupations that participants aspired to included animation, radio and/or music production (especially hip-hop and rap) and music videos. 17-year-old Annie wanted to work for girl magazines, and 19-year-old Boris wanted to be a screenwriter. Other dream jobs in the creative industries included fashion photography, film directing, acting or playing in a band.

Those who chose to follow available learning pathways at Youthworx, after years of disconnection from mainstream schooling, observed:

*I don't understand school. You have to ask to go to the toilet; you're not allowed to speak. They say to be quiet while you're doing your work. Are they joking?*

*I had trouble with classes because I don't like large groups so I got to the stage I wouldn't leave the house, I kinda closed myself in.*

'Home' is often referred to as debilitating and demoralising, conjuring up ideas of limitation and social exclusion. Joining the Youthworx (or earlier Brunswick Youth Services) community was seen as a liberating experience:

*There is more to life than staying at home and doing nothin.*

Many Youthworx participants had a history of long-term homelessness or unstable housing. It is little wonder that their descriptions of home conveyed something that young people do not have control over or something highly precarious. Coming to Youthworx was a way out of staying at home:

*I was arsed if it was going to just sit at home and be stupid, do stupid things. [Doing something] has kept me sane, kept me from being at home and getting bored, getting into trouble with the cops and drugs, and all that sort of things. I had to do something.*

This was a common account. Youthworx participants were hungry for an alternative to getting lonely at home, 'killing time' playing computer games, 'watching DVDs all day long' or getting involved in drugs and criminal behaviour. They welcomed an opportunity to engage with people in a social context of creative learning and self-exploration:

**WHEN I STARTED, I WAS INTERESTED IN RADIO. I FOUND THAT REALLY FUN. BUT THEN WE WERE ALSO DOING MUSIC AND MEDIA AND MUSIC PRODUCING. I FOUND THAT A BIT HARDER AND I WASN'T REALLY INTERESTED IN THAT. I THOUGHT I WOULD BE INTERESTED IN THAT, BUT THEN WHEN I STARTED LEARNING ABOUT IT, I DIDN'T REALLY LIKE IT AS MUCH. THEN WHEN WE STARTED LEARNING ABOUT MEDIA, ABOUT FILMING AND EDITING, THEN THAT'S WHEN I REALLY STARTED LIKING IT. WHEN WE HAD DONE A BIG PROJECT, THAT'S WHEN I FOUND IT REALLY FUN AND I REALLY ENJOYED IT.**

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## SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND VOCATIONAL SKILLS

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Our fieldwork material, complemented with the follow-up research, reveals a set of contributions for young people, particularly in relation to the project's social dimensions.

During the follow-up interviews, all 17 interviewees reported they benefited from Youthworx, with many affirming the value of the program for social skill development, especially confidence building. Roughly one third of 17 graduates noted the important role of the supportive social environment that ensured a solid basis for further (education/employment) opportunities. An important part of pathway building was seen in the way Youthworx offered practical assistance to young people struggling with negative external circumstances as illustrated in the following accounts:

**THE BEST THING I HAVE EVER DONE IS COME TO YOUTHWORX, BECAUSE, HONESTLY, ALL HIGH SCHOOL I HAD NO IDEA WHAT I WANTED TO DO AND I MEAN I WENT THROUGH A LOT LAST YEAR AND I THOUGHT IT WAS THE END OF THE WORLD, BUT WHEN I CAME HERE IT WAS LIKE I FOUND FRIENDS THAT WERE LIKE MY FAMILY TO ME NOW AND I HAVE LEARNT SO MUCH.**

**YES, THEY GOT ME STARTED OFF, I WOULDN'T BE STUDYING NOW IF IT WASN'T FOR THEM, I WAS AT THE BAD PLACE WHEN I JOINED YOUTHWORX AND IT HELPED ME.**

**IF IT WASN'T FOR THEM, I'D HAVE TROUBLE FINDING HOME, BECAUSE WHEN I SIGNED UP I WAS OUT OF HOME AND [THEY] LINKED ME UP WITH A REFUGE. ALSO THROUGH VCAL [THAT WAS RUNNING THROUGH BYS] I WAS ABLE TO GET SOME BASIC KNOWLEDGE OF MATHS, ENGLISH BECAUSE I WASN'T ACROSS THAT. THEY HELPED ME GET OUT OF MY COMFORT ZONE, IN A GOOD WAY, BECAUSE I WAS DOWN AND DEPRESSED.**

When asked to identify the best thing about Youthworx, the majority of the 17 interviewees in the follow-up interviews emphasised (again) the Youthworx environment, linking it on the one hand to the value of alternative learning space (especially around hands-on, practical and technical experience), and, on the other, to a sense of community with people working with them, both teachers and other students.

The combined research material testifies to the program's wide-ranging contribution, including individual 'soft' skill development, social competences and networks, and vocational skills acquired by young people in the process. These skills are interconnected, confirming the argument from earlier studies (Dewson, Eccles et al. 2000; Slater, Gidley et al., 2007), and necessary for productive social and professional engagement on the project and beyond.

Purposeful and serious engagement with media production reinforced their sense of self-value, capacity and opportunity. It also challenges preconceived ideas that associate youth-led media with fun-based engagement only. Instead, we concur with Soep's (Soep 2007; Soep and Chavez 2010) ethnography-based observations about youth media production as disciplined work, or Leadbeater's notion of 'pro-am' or serious leisure', that is, combining leisure-based activities with work to professional standards (Leadbeater and Miller 2004). For example, media production as part of more advanced mentoring/traineeship at Youthworx intends to emulate real media industry and involves a formal application, job interview to get a place in the program, followed by clear instructions, deadlines, understanding of audiences, media market etc. This is often a revealing experience; young people learn to really appreciate the nitty gritty of the creative processes, including less glamorous aspects such as editing or tight deadlines. And yet, we have observed, paid traineeships (as part of mentorship projects with expert filmmakers or within Youthworx Productions) can bring an additional degree of self-satisfaction because creative work is recognised and validated by others in the real world, outside the supportive 'social work' context (see Podkalicka and Wilson forthcoming). They allow for significant transformations to occur, including strengthening and expanding one's social and professional networks (elaborated below).

When asked if the Youthworx experience was useful, the vast majority of 17 interviewees in the follow-up interviews responded positively. They included the value of practical experience, especially technical and media competence, the general use of the program in opening up other professional opportunities and social aspects such as improved self-confidence, communication and time-management skills. Similarly, when asked if they thought they were now perceived differently compared to before the program, the numbers (roughly one third of 17) were divided between yes and no. A few were unsure. The most common answer for those who reported a difference related to professional relations, followed by friends and family, and self. Again, in several cases professional and social contexts were intertwined.

What works well for young people is access to high-quality media equipment, professional expertise and distribution networks. This is sometimes true also for 'low-fi' radio technology which some participants find 'cool' because they can cross-promote their own or their friends' creative work, and it is more difficult to get 'your stuff' on the radio than on YouTube:

**I FOUND [BEING ON SYN RADIO] REALLY GOOD. THE FEEDBACK, LIKE YOU FEEL PRETTY PROUD WHEN YOU HEAR YOURSELF. YOU CAN GET IT RECORDED AND STUFF. I TOLD ALL MY FRIENDS AND I ALSO GOT A CHANCE TO PROMOTE MY FRIEND'S EVENT THAT HE RUNS. THEN A LOT OF PEOPLE HEARD ABOUT IT AND CAME FROM THAT. ALSO, MY FRIEND IS JUST STARTING TO BE A DJ AND HE MADE HIS FIRST SONG. I'VE GOT TO PLAY THAT, SO ALL HIS FRIENDS HEARD IT. SO THAT WAS REALLY GOOD.**

In summary, the skills gained and their corresponding indicators have been cross-referenced with previous studies and grouped into broad categories for purposes of analysis (Dewson, Eccles et al. 2000; Slater, Gidley et al., 2007). They are interconnected and include individual 'soft' skill development, social competences and networks, and vocational skills.

| <b>PERSONAL GROWTH AND INDIVIDUAL 'SOFT' SKILL-BUILDING</b>                          | <b>DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL SKILLS AND NETWORKS</b>                          | <b>INDIVIDUAL VOCATIONAL SKILL-BUILDING</b>   |
|--|---|---|
| Increased self-confidence and self-esteem  | Increased ability to interact and collaborate                             | Increased digital literacy and technical competences  |
| Improved communication skills  | Increased desire to build and maintain social networks                    | Improved knowledge of and participation in creative content production process  |
| Improved behaviour management  | Increased interest in and confidence with exploring professional networks | Improved applied knowledge of real-world media industry and work ethic, e.g. industry quality standards and work ethos                                      |
| Increased motivation   |   | Improved quality of creative works (confirmed by TAFE accreditation, growing reputation, increasing number of commissioned works for Youthworx Productions) |
| Stronger sense of group/ community belonging   |   |   |
| New ideas and strategies for life  |   |   |
| Improved basic life-skills, e.g. time management, self-discipline and responsibility |   |   |

For example, 'soft' skills such as communication competencies can support the learning process when new technical skills are being acquired. These skills also complement each other over time, through a process of gradual, accumulative capacity-building. For example, gaining time management skills may provide a foundation for the development of more advanced 'hard' vocational competencies, such as efficient use of equipment in the post-production phase. Many of these skills are transferable; once gained they may be applied across different domains of both personal and professional life. The ability to receive and act on feedback in a media production setting may later be applied in other vocational, social or personal contexts: workplace inductions, interacting with support organisations such as Centrelink, maintaining personal relationships or collaborating with a case worker:

**I REALLY LIKE THIS TYPE OF WORK, AND THE SKILLS I'VE LEARNED HAVE BEEN REALLY GOOD, BECAUSE IT HELPED IN DOING HEAPS OF DIFFERENT THINGS, EVEN HELPING OUT WITH FRIENDS AND STUFF. THEY ARE WANTING ME TO EDIT THINGS FOR THEM, LIKE MOVIES, VIDEOS. THE CONTACTS THAT WE'VE MET, LIKE THIS PROFESSIONAL FILMMAKER, IF WE ARE GOING TO GET A CAREER OR SOMETHING, THAT'S GOOD THAT WE KNOW SOMEONE LIKE THAT AND WE ARE LEARNING ALL THE STUFF FROM HIM.**

Another student commented:

**YEAH, I FOUND IT REALLY EASY TO GET MORE INTO DIFFERENT WORK AND STUFF. I WAS TALKING TO A FRIEND AND HE GOT OFFERED A PAID JOB TO EDIT A DJ'S TRAILER AND THEN HE ASKED IF I WANTED TO BE INVOLVED I SAID, 'YEAH, SURE.' THAT WAS PRETTY COOL. I GOT MY NEXT EXPERIENCE.**

Many testified to higher levels of confidence, self-esteem and capacity to interact and collaborate with others:

**I GOT MORE CONFIDENCE, I CAN ACTUALLY SAY SOMETHING. I WANT TO GO SOMEWHERE, I WANT TO DO THIS, ETC. I WILL PUT MY FOOT DOWN AND TRY TO DO IT.**

## ACCESS TO MEDIA: LINKS TO LITERACY

Our fieldwork indicates that many Youthworx participants had access to computers (not always at home) and were heavy users of mobiles and online social networking. Although it is difficult to make a uniform statement about their general digital literacy because of the very varied levels of competences that characterise this group, it is problematic to define them as either 'digital natives' or 'digitally marginalised'. However, their disadvantage can be linked to the lack of access to cultural resources of family, school and work. The program's role is to assist them with making the transition from digital to social and economic literacy by connecting to relevant 'networks of opportunity for broadcast, policy impact, jobs and higher education' (Soep and Chavez 2010).

Media work is not always creative. Despite the noted general appeal of media creation, many technical aspects were seen as demanding and tedious:

**FILMING WOULD BE MY FAVOURITE PART. I DON'T LIKE EDITING; I LIKE MAKING THE MESS – NOT CLEANING IT UP.**

High-cost equipment (with updated software and hardware) held a great attraction for many young people; many commented that they did not have access to this sort of technology at home, much less professional expertise and adult and peer feedback. However, working in a studio with a number of students can be also quite disruptive, especially for those who are expected to meet concrete deadlines. A couple of advanced students commented that they would prefer to work alone at home. For the paid trainees at Youthworx Productions, there is a now a separate production room shared with adult practitioners and project managers. There is also a very mixed story regarding the appeal of having their own work widely distributed; some were very keen to upload it online, some not; some like going on the radio very much, some had no interest whatsoever.

Finally, it was well-recognised that media training and production involves an array of skills to complete a creative project, including research, writing, communicating ideas, technical competences. Youthworx participants, even the most talented and dedicated, admitted their reluctance to write for either creative or administrative purposes, e.g. job applications:

**STUDENT: I DON'T LIKE WRITING; I CAN'T SPELL ...**

**INTERVIEWER: BUT YOU READ A LOT ...**

**STUDENT: BUT IT'S NOT BIG LONG WORDS LIKE IN A DICTIONARY; IN THE MAGAZINES IT'S JUST TALKING WORDS.**



## LEARNING CULTURE

Although Youthworx is at first sight very different from a mainstream classroom, with a small number of students working individually or in small groups in an art-studio-like room (each with a large new Macintosh computer), the young people commonly called it a 'TAFE' or 'school' when they were speaking of it to their peers or family. And yet, when asked to describe Youthworx, they often contrasted their experience there with that at mainstream schools. They stressed the value of working in small groups, less pressure and easy-going work. The work environment is described as laid-back, you get to do a job you're interested in, and you don't have people on your back all the time. Being treated as a grown-up has important consequences for self-discovery:

**TEACHERS DON'T FORCE YOU TO BE THERE, THEY GIVE YOU TOOLS TO DECIDE THINGS. NO DRILLS SO [IT] ALLOWED ME TO REALISE THINGS WHERE EASIER OR MORE STRAIGHTFORWARD THAN THEY SEEMED.**

Positive descriptions frequently referred to quality interaction with teachers and students, and a diversity of people at Youthworx. At the same time, participants found it hard to define the learning culture:

**IT DOESN'T FEEL LIKE FORMAL SCHOOL. IT FEELS LIKE A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE THAT ARE INTERESTED IN THE SAME THING COME AND LEARN. IT'S AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE PEOPLE WANT TO LEARN AND THEY ARE INTERESTED IN IT. EVERYONE IS HAPPY TO HAVE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN. EVERYONE HAS BEEN REALLY, REALLY GOOD HERE. MY FRIENDS DROPPED PAST WHEN I WAS DOING INTERVIEWS AND THEY ALL SAID THAT THIS IS A REALLY GOOD LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND IT'S JUST A REALLY GOOD SETUP THAT WE'VE GOT GOING ON. THE CURRICULUM AND HOW TEACHERS WORK IS REALLY GOOD. IT MADE IT EASIER ON THE STUDENTS. EVERYONE SEEMS PRETTY HAPPY TO BE HERE.**

Other students explained:

**PEOPLE HERE ARE UNDERSTANDING, THEY EXPLAIN A PROBLEM, THEY HAVE EITHER GOT SOLUTIONS OR THEY CAN RESOLVE IT FOR YOU. I DON'T KNOW, IT FEELS LIKE A DIFFERENT PLACE – IT IS NOT LIKE A SCHOOL, BUT IT DOESN'T FEEL LIKE A YOUTH SERVICE EITHER.**

**THEY DON'T TELL YOU'RE NOT SMART OR YOU DON'T WORK HARD ENOUGH. AND THEY DON'T TELL YOU LIES LIKE THEY DO AT SCHOOL ... 'OH, YOU NEED A YEAR 12 PASS', BUT YOU DON'T, YOU JUST NEED A YEAR 12 EQUIVALENT.**

**IT'S LIKE A SOCIAL THING AS WELL. IT'S NOT LIKE A SCHOOL WHERE YOU ALWAYS GOT YOUR SECTIONS AND GROUPS, LIKE NERDS. BUT HERE IT'S LIKE EVERYONE'S FRIENDS WITH EVERYONE. WE MIGHT NOT HANG OUT IN THE SAME GROUP, BUT WE STILL CHAT AND MINGLE AMONG EACH OTHER AND STUFF AS WELL.**

Diversity is a defining feature of Youthworx, engaging different kinds of young people and accommodating a diverse range of interests, levels of literacy, needs and aspirations. This is consistent with Walsh, Lemon et al.'s (2011) observation about the Australian vocational education and training (VET) in general, or Slater, Gidley et al., (2007) finding about youth media projects in the UK. It is inclusive of those who join the project with clearly stated motivations as well as of those who are there to 'work out what to do next'. It is equally engaging for young people who are savvy about operating discourses behind social/youth work services and the cultural category of 'youth at risk' that they inhabit, as well as those who do not share this degree of social awareness. This potential for intermixing and diversity has a value to the young people and was articulated in contrast with mainstream schools:

**EVERYONE IS ALL COMBINED ... UNLIKE MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS WHERE THERE ARE MANY SMALL SEGREGATED GROUPS OF KIDS – SPORT KIDS, NERDY KIDS, POOR KIDS, MEDIUM CLASS KIDS.**



A mixed culture of participation with diverse levels of literacy and engagement does not mean disorganised, ineffective learning. It can open up valuable possibilities of pro-am and peer-to-peer knowledge transfer (see e.g. Walsh et al. 2011: 14; Ito et al. 2010). In addition to strong emotional support and encouragement that these young people offer to one another:

**I THINK WE'VE LEARNED WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW, BUT WE'VE ALSO LEARNED FROM EACH OTHER AS WELL. LIKE BECAUSE CRAIG'S FIGURED OUT THE STUDIO, AND THEN EVERYBODY ELSE COMES AND HE SHOWS EVERYBODY ELSE WHAT HE'S LEARNED. THEN SOMEONE ELSE WILL KNOW SOMETHING THAT I DON'T KNOW, I'LL GO TO THEM FOR HELP, OR SOMEONE WILL COME TO ME BECAUSE I KNOW SOMETHING THEY DON'T KNOW. IT'S LIKE A GROUP THING.**

The productive spirit of collaboration was confirmed by a professional film-maker who worked with a small group on a real-world music video project in 2009:

**WHAT YOU GUYS HAVE CREATED HERE IS JUST INCREDIBLE, NOT ONLY IN TERMS OF TECHNICAL FACILITIES TO GET THESE PROJECTS DONE AND THE SUPPORT AND HAVING A COURSE LIKE THIS, BUT THEY HAVE EACH OTHER. I'VE SEEN HOW THEY DO WORK WITH EACH OTHER. IT IS REALLY WEIRD BECAUSE INITIALLY IT WAS TOLD TO ME THAT THERE ARE SOMETIMES SOME CONFLICTS BETWEEN THEM. MAYBE THAT IS THE CASE BUT NEVER WHEN I'VE BEEN AROUND. EVEN ON THE SHOOT. AND IN MY INDUSTRY, SHOOTS ARE ALWAYS WHERE THE SHIT HITS THE FAN. NOT ONLY DID EVERYONE ACT PROFESSIONALLY, BUT EVERYONE HAD EACH OTHER'S BACK. SO THERE WERE MOMENTS WHERE ONE OF THEM WAS GETTING TIRED AND THE OTHER ONE WAS LIKE, YOU KNOW, YOU'RE TIRED, SO I'LL PICK UP THE SLACK ON THIS ONE. THAT IS WHAT CREWS DO – THEY HAVE GOT EACH OTHER. SO I CAN TELL YOU WHEN THEY LEAVE HERE IF THEY DECIDE TO CONTINUE WITH FILM STUFF, THEY WILL STILL HAVE EACH OTHER TO CALL ON, AND I BET YOU THEY WILL.**

## ENGAGEMENT

Development of 'an authentic culture of engagement' is crucial for a youth project's success. Bureaucratic services disguised as creative interventions cannot attract – and significantly retain – young people. Being recognised, trusted and treated honestly and respectfully in a non-judgemental way is fundamental for this demographic. Being considered as a student and a 'friend', rather than a 'client' reduced to 'some boxes to tick off', as one student explained, is a powerful mechanism for participants to regain a belief in self and society. The importance of the social dimensions in setting up a crucial practical and emotional structure for personal and professional development was confirmed in the follow-up interviews. The nurturing environment is a key ingredient to the possibility of young people to engage and thrive in a longer-term – powerfully expressed in the following account:

**KNOWING THAT THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP ME BECAUSE I DIDN'T BELIEVE I COULD BE HELPED. BEFORE I WAS AN ANGRY KID, WHO WOULD WALK AWAY WHEN PEOPLE STARTED TALKING TO ME. I FELT LIKE BEING IN A TUNNEL. TRUST IS A BIG ISSUE; THE TEACHERS [AT YOUTHWORX] AREN'T JUST WRITING THEIR REPORTS BUT SOME OF THEM STILL RING ME UP TO SEE HOW I'M GOING.**

Being taken seriously extends to and is reinforced by a media work culture that does not patronise young people but values their creative potential while setting reasonable models and expectations (Podkalicka and Campbell 2010). The lesson from the Youthworx experience is the need to afford learning opportunities based on flexible gradual development pathways (from simple to advanced skill-based media production), including experiences of 'self-expression' (voice) and professional media production. While it is important for those most vested in media work to be able to progress towards skilled professional media production, for some Youthworx participants, media professionalism is either undesired or unachievable. It is important, however, that all students are given a chance to develop basic skills such as punctuality, presentability, respect for others' work, collaboration, capacity for feedback and self-critique (Podkalicka and Thomas 2010; Podkalicka and Wilson forthcoming). A position strongly advocated by The Salvation Army is to provide a safe and supportive learning environment, instead of over-emphasising a high-standard professional or vocational skill development as this can remind Youthworx young participants of continued failure in mainstream education and thus complicate the project's intended developmental aim (Campbell 2009; Podkalicka and Campbell 2010; Podkalicka and Thomas 2010; see also Belfiore 2002 for discussion about the notion of quality applied to participatory arts projects).

It is important to acknowledge erratic patterns of attendance and fluctuating levels of engagement, often due to young people's external circumstances, and the impact this has on the project's delivery. It often took a very long time for participants to finish their projects. For example, it could take weeks to complete a two-minute monologue. One Youthworx media practitioner reflected:

**THE FLEXIBILITY IN THE WAY YOUTHWORX OPERATES, BOTH THE STUDIO AND THE BUSINESS ARE SHAPED BY THE FREQUENTLY CHAOTIC LIVES OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE. BEING THERE TO PICK UP WHERE THEY LEFT OFF THE PROJECTS/ WORK [IS IMPORTANT].**

In the real situation of complex social dysfunction and exclusion, the project's success, measured as its ability to facilitate real social change, is contingent on external factors beyond Youthworx's immediate context. To address this, Youthworx has developed an integrated model that employs a full-time social worker to support young people outside of the classroom as well. The model broadens significantly the scope of Youthworx staff's involvement in the lives of the youth that they seek to engage.

Nonetheless, the 'inside and outside of the classroom' can be hard to navigate; it requires resilience and determination. But an opportunity to 're-learn how to learn' was very important and reaffirming for many young people:

**IT DEPENDS WHERE YOU LIVE AND HOW YOU HAVE BEEN BROUGHT UP. IF YOU HAVE BEEN STEALING CARS, TAKING DRUGS AND ALL THAT, YOU CAN'T REALLY GO NOWHERE. AT LEAST THEN, IF YOU COME HERE [YOUTHWORX], YOU CAN AT LEAST PUT DRUGS ASIDE FOR A FEW HOURS TO DO SOME WORK; AT LEAST YOU'VE DONE SOMETHING, AND THEN, YOU KNOW YOU CAN COME BACK THE NEXT DAY AND DO THE SAME THING. AT NIGHT, DO WHATEVER YOU HAVE TO DO, THE NEXT DAY GO AND GO TO YOUR SCHOOL [YOUTHWORX]. THIS IS HOW I HAVE COPED.**

Youthworx's learning culture of 'authentic engagement' was not easy to develop. From the staff perspective, working with these young people is like 'walking a tightrope of being both the teacher/rule enforcer and their friend/confidante'. The creative process, however, can be very rewarding. This is well captured by one professional filmmaker who ran a training program in 2009:

**ONE THING THAT I HAVE LEARNED IS NEVER TO UNDERESTIMATE SOMEONE JUST BECAUSE THEY DON'T HAVE TECHNICAL SKILLS ... EACH OF [THE PARTICIPANTS] REALLY HAS A PASSION AND IT TRANSLATED TO THEIR OWN TYPE OF ARTISTIC SKILL. IT BLOWS MY MIND BECAUSE I OFTEN SEE WEAKNESSES IN WHAT I DO AND WHERE THEY CAN PICK UP THE SLACK – YOU PUT THEM IN A SITUATION WHERE THEY HAVE A REASON TO STEP UP, OR GIVE THEM A LITTLE BIT OF SUPPORT AND THEY ARE GOING TO SURPRISE YOU. I WILL FEEL REWARDED IF I HEAR THAT THEY CONTINUE TO DO THIS STUFF BECAUSE I KNOW I'LL HAVE SOME COMPETITION. I JUST KNOW IT ... IF THEY STICK AT IT, PEOPLE LIKE ME WILL HAVE TO STEP UP OUR GAME.**

Although professional media production holds a great attraction for young people, and contacts with industry experts are of high value for their personal transformations as well as organisational development, it is the Youthworx on-the-ground staff who should be credited with preparing the ground and developing a specific ethos for its media production culture. The debate about the sustainability of Youthworx as a social enterprise should thus include both financial considerations (such as whether it will be able to attract enough external money through commission work) and the sustainability of human capital. The latter means ensuring that there are enough young people who want and can work there and at high production level, as well as adults who continue to invest their passion and vision into it. The related, difficult question is how to increase a pool of students who can benefit from Youthworx without compromising the importance of the supportive social environment that young people value so highly.

# SIGNIFICANCE OF THE YOUTHWORX MODEL: SOCIAL IMPACT

Youthworx is an Australian example of the practical application of a creative industries approach to building social capacity through relevant and meaningful media-based activities for 'real' social and economic participation. In that regard, it is unlike community arts-oriented programs that focus on self-expression as a form of therapy, on artistic products as an end in themselves, or 'art for art's sake' (Belfiore, 2002: 104).

As a social enterprise, Youthworx has three critical unique elements:

- A new paradigm in youth and social development
- Links between creative industries and youth development
- Novel social partnerships between education and training sectors, community media, NGOs, not-for-profit sector and three tiers of government.

Youthworx is a deliberate attempt to tackle youth disengagement by intervening at two levels: at the policy level, where social development and creative industries frameworks have converged to provide the structural capacity for a project of this type; and at the practice level, where media creators, teachers and social workers collaborate to work with disengaged young people. There are six main elements of innovation in the project:

1. **Youthworx as an experiment in social partnership and innovation** has drawn significant financial and in-kind support from social service providers, in particular The Salvation Army, and community media. It is an interesting example of how complex, networked approaches to social problems (Mulgan et al. 2007) might intersect with the facilitation of industry development, providing resources and the flexibility to experiment on the periphery of emerging (labour/creative) markets in the new creative economy.
2. **Youthworx as an experiment in education and training** provides a flexible approach to creative production and skill formation. This is facilitated by the connection between creative economy and new approaches to social policy. The thinking behind Youthworx recognises the complexity of social disadvantage and the need to intervene from different points within networked governance. It represents an innovative model that embeds a mix of diversionary, educational and business objectives within its organisational structure to engender youth transitions from fun-based creative activities and professional training to commercially viable media production and distribution. This is realised by a strong commitment to:
  - An open structure with a set of customised pathway-based programs
  - Diversified skill development (including 'soft' and 'hard' skills ranging from an increase in confidence and interpersonal communication to technical production proficiency and entrepreneurship)
  - Flexible, contractual work arrangements with part-time teachers and industry experts
  - Strategic linkages with markets (SYN Media, government/NGO commissions) in real-world media industry, even if peripheral
  - Emulation of industry-like organisational culture for the social enterprise.

3. **Youthworx as a model of doing youth work** attends directly and indirectly to the support needs of young participants while focusing on the creative experiential part of their lives. This approach could be described as a total package or it could be seen as a model working simultaneously at all levels of the Maslow hierarchy of needs. Most resources directed to supporting and assisting youth with problems or marginalised youth focus on redressing the problems. Youthworx's contribution and the model importantly provide creative and expressive experiences that are also vocationally useful.
4. **Youthworx as an experiment in creative economy and social inequality** tests the potential of broadening the social base of the creative economy, including participants and trainees from outside the cultural resources of school, family, work and training.
5. **Youthworx as an experiment in youth media** demonstrates the neglected potential for innovation in the community youth media and peripheral media sectors. It shows that there is considerable scope for adaptation, diversity and alternative models of peer-to-peer, pro-am learning as an 'open' social service and media training provider. The partnership with Youthworx has allowed SYN Media to access hard-to-reach youth demographics and diversify its voluntary base and community media content. Similarly, customising apprenticeship models of creative industries' SMEs to the needs of marginalised youth suggests that there is clear potential to contribute to young people's development within this area.
6. **Finally, Youthworx's social enterprise model highlights opportunities for intermediate creative labour market creation** through mixed-mode funding and SME and partnerships with public, commercial and community agencies. Networks and branding (Slater, Gidley et al., 2007) are important for a project's financial and cultural sustainability. Trainees identify strongly with the Youthworx brand. However, if there is too narrow a focus on brand development, the youth developmental role may be compromised.

# CONCLUSIONS

The research confirms that media are 'a powerful magnet' for young people to become reinvolved in learning (Slater, Gidley et al., 2007). Youthworx's intervention and direct impact is greatest at the point where young people think they 'can't do nothing', as explained by Youthworx staff, or 'have no idea what they want to do', as explained by young people. Youthworx demonstrates that media can be used as a medium for skill acquisition, personal development and network building, a finding consistent with other studies (Slater, Gidley et al., 2007). In getting access to media resources and expertise within a supportive, collaborative learning context, young people are provided with learning pathways and an opportunity for empowerment through:

- Mediated self-expression whereby participants' voices and stories are respected, valued, and shared with friends and family and via media outlets;
- Skill development whereby social and media skills acquired in the creative process are transferable to other personal and professional domains or applied in the creative economy.

Youthworx has enabled marginalised young people to make use of media technology and expertise to develop their interest in learning and ideas for life. At a more advanced level, through engagement in real-world media activities as part of a 'community of practice', participants are given an opportunity to develop their 'identity' as professional media makers (Podkalicka and Wilson forthcoming). They are becoming media producers in their own right, proud to have their work publicly showcased and distributed commercially. It is empowering for young people to not only produce their own content but market it for economic benefits (Hartley 2007; Bloustein 2008; Soep and Chavez 2010) with the assistance of social enterprises. However, their engagement in media training and production does not mean that they will choose to or can pursue employment in creative industries. But the project's goals aren't limited to that. As we demonstrated earlier, Youthworx does assist young people in developing a range of general skills transferable to different personal and professional domains. The program is successful in supporting youth transitions into a range of formalised education, training and employment settings. This is a powerful finding, given the background of the Youthworx young demographic.

While our research has attempted to record transformations and transitions over time by contextualising quantitative data with in-depth qualitative fieldwork material filling an identified gap in media studies literature, we acknowledge its limitations. These are linked to constantly shifting ideas of what young people want to be and how they imagine their skills to translate outside the program, the long time needed for outcomes to start emerge, and the persistent volatility of young people's lives during and after the program. The impact of the project on young people's lives can come to be appreciated later, and we tried to capture them through the follow-up interviews with Youthworx graduates up to three years since course completion. But some outcomes might never be revealed in an easily recognisable form or shape. For this reason, it is difficult to consider youth media projects in themselves as adequate to address problems of youth marginalisation.

Our research demonstrated that the Youthworx integrated model – with a full time social worker on site – is fully functional and effective. In many cases it helps alleviate practical barriers to engagement in the program and often beyond, such as the lack of available housing or transport. At the same time the interference of external negative factors cannot be fully countered. Despite the noted success of Youthworx, demonstrated by youth transitions into formal education and employment, some young people appear to have further disengaged from the mainstream society, with at least 5 several falling completely outside the system. Other studies note that young people's success (or failure) cannot always be attributable to the project's intervention but may be linked to external factors in their lives (Dewson, Eccles et al. 2000), therefore the understanding of a broader context is crucial.

We are cautious about idealising media-based interventions, but the picture about youth transitions that emerges from our research is a positive one. Young people who join Youthworx are disadvantaged but not so much in terms of access to digital technology, including the Internet, as the standard 'digital divide' argument would have it. Jenkins' (2009) concept of 'the participation gap' understood as uneven access to 'opportunities, experiences, skills and knowledge' seems more appropriate. The complex disadvantage and lack of cultural, social and economic capital inform their individual trajectories and create a barrier to participation in education and social mobility. Following Leadbeater and Wong (2009), we suggest that Youthworx's success then should be considered in terms of its ability to break a cycle of individual self-destructive behaviour (e.g. getting locked up every six months), intergenerational reliance on welfare, inadequate education or skill development. We also recognise, after Reguillo (2009), broader structural conditions such as inadequate material support or failings of the mainstream schooling system as linked to youth exclusion (see also Bentley and Oakley 1999). As noted earlier, a diversionary and restorative capacity of alternative learning sites such as Youthworx is justified within the youth work sector on the basis of cost-benefit analysis. This means that the success of youth media enterprises such as Youthworx should be considered against both intangible and tangible outcomes and within a social innovation paradigm (Mulgan 2008).

9



One major finding was the high value young people placed on the supportive, enabling and nurturing culture of Youthworx. This has implications for the project's development directions – its potential for scalability and sustainability. This culture of engagement did not emerge by chance, but was deliberately forged and developed over time. The success of this model hinges on financial support as much as on the skills, vision and dedication of the facilitators. The guidance and support they offer are crucial, given the high and complex needs and level of disengagement of the young people Youthworx services. Wholly youth-run models such as SYN Media do not offer the required level of support for young people who are disengaged from education and training, and may be experiencing difficulties stemming from homelessness, drug, alcohol or mental health issues, social isolation or abuse and family breakdown. Finally, it is important to appreciate that, for all the challenges that these young people experience and present, they have enormous potential to learn, to create and to transform their own lives. One of the continuing students commented:

**[WHEN I FIRST] CAME IN TO [YUETHWORX] I SAW THE STUDIO AND THE COMPUTERS THEY HAVE HERE AND THE RECORDING STUDIO, AND THEY'VE REALLY PULLED OUT ALL THE STOPS TO GET THIS TO WORK. I'VE BEEN TO OTHER PLACES BEFORE AND THEY'VE GOT LIKE NOTHING, NOTHING LIKE THIS, LIKE THE BEST YOU GET IS A LITTLE RECORDER TO RECORD TRACKS OR SOMETHING. HERE YOU'VE GOT A WHOLE STUDIO AND I JUST THOUGHT, 'DAMN, I'VE GOT TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY', BECAUSE I'M PROBABLY NOT GOING TO GET ANOTHER ONE AND A PLACE LIKE THIS.**





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# APPENDIX I: YOUTHWORX PROJECT AIMS AND DESIGN

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## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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Youthworx is an integrated R&D program driven by four interrelated research and development aims:

- YWX-led intervention to promote youth development and social capacity-building for disenfranchised young people, using media production and co-creative pedagogy
- YWX-enabled creative industry development in terms of skill, content and market formation
- ISR/CCI-led research to explore and analyse the impact of Youthworx on young people's lives, to track the project's development and sustainability as an innovative social enterprise, and to explore its implications as an applied example of new links between social policy, social service provision and creative industries
- ISR/CCI-led research to enhance Youthworx's practice by feeding back the findings based on ethnographic research into young people's involvement in the project, and a comparative study into parallel international youth media enterprise programs to build long-term capacity beyond the Linkage Project life-span.

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## RESEARCH PROJECT DESIGN

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The research conducted between 2008 and 2013 addressed three main sections presented in the report.

### *The Youthworx model*

Description and analysis of Youthworx's development, implementation, operation and expansion:

- How did Youthworx emerge as a social partnership and a social enterprise?
- How has it sought to engage with markets for creative content and skills?
- Where do connections and tensions lie between social and industrial policies?
- How does Youthworx reflect other aspects of the Australian innovation system, especially in relation to third-sector, government and commercial functions?

### *Participation and youth development*

Description and analysis of media pedagogies, training and cultural production:

- How successful has Youthworx been in helping engaging young people in co-creative practice?
- How do different types of expertise and strategies connect?

Description and interpretation of young people's experiences on the program:

- What are young people's motivations to join the project?
- What are their expectations in relation to the project?
- What do they consider as the most valuable contribution of the project?
- What are their future educational/vocational plans?
- How successful has Youthworx been in assisting young people in making transitions from disengagement to an intended reconnection with education and employment, e.g. social and vocational outcomes, capacity to ensue students' transformations.

### *The broader significance of Youthworx*

- The Youthworx model as a creative industries-led approach to youth development, linking media production to new kinds of social service delivery.
- What the Youthworx model can tell us about the most effective ways of enabling youth transitions and about the social impacts of youth media enterprises.

# APPENDIX II: TIMELINE

## *Phase 1: 2005-09*

- Establishment of the social partnership between YDA, SYN, Salvation Army and Swinburne University/CCI.
- Capital costs covered from philanthropic and corporate funds.
- Studio set up in Tinning St, Brunswick. Media teachers and trainers start working with youth disconnected from formal learning, training and employment. Creative production and distribution: live broadcasting on SYN FM, creating digital stories, mini-documentaries, short films, original music.
- Open access workshops for approximately 100 young people, and accredited training for approximately 60 [note difference with CCI bid] Certificate I/II/III/IV in Creative Industries (Media)/VCAL.
- Small-scale commercial projects within Youthworx Productions, e.g. film-mentoring project with Multicultural Arts Victoria (filming live performance events) and a mini-documentary on homelessness for Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation.
- Receipt of \$15,000 from the Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development to prepare a business plan based on commissioned real-world media projects, employment, internship and accredited training.

## *Phase 2: 2010-13*

- Receipt of funding from Department of Human Services to cover Youthworx media training salaries (\$248,000 in 2010, \$255,000 in 2011 and \$260,000 in 2012). Capital costs from philanthropic and corporate funds. Commonwealth job creation funding.
- Youthworx Productions commences as a social enterprise.

## *Plans for 2010-15*

- Creation of Youthworx jobs in schools and NGOs. Evolving mixed media culture: media graduates and media-trained young people employed alongside untrained youth, including the disadvantaged youth demographic. An opportunity to build on SYN Media partnership for online and TV distribution, not only radio.
- Development of mobile outreach services: mobile studio, editing, online facilities.
- Consolidation of Youthworx as an innovative youth media enterprise, drawing on a mix of public, third-sector and commercial funding sources to create a viable business model. Young people employed to create media content and train others. Clients: government and community agencies seeking social marketing of issues and initiatives. Outcomes: sustainability, training and accreditation pathways.
- Audiences reached through content commissioning organisations (governmental and NGO agencies) as part of Youthworx Productions.

# APPENDIX III: YOUTH- WORX PRODUCTIONS: JOBS FUND PROJECTS

YSince its launch in 2010 Youthworx Productions have delivered on a great number of for-fee media content and training projects to a range of clients. It has employed over 20 young people working alongside media experts. Some examples are outlined below:

- 'Knife Violence' documentary: two project leaders (Artan Jama and Andrew Southwell as radio producers); three young project assistants.
- 'Warima – Dancing in the Dust': production of an educational DVD to accompany the release of Boori Pryor's book Shake A Leg: Four project leaders: Meme McDonald (writer), Boori Pryor (writer), Ian Jones (cinematographer), Sam O'Reilly (sound producer).
- 'Fringe Lane', a 13 part TV series developed for Channel 31: four project leaders (Tahlia Azaria, Cristina Laria, Peta McInnes, David Franjic)
- Black Harmony mini-doco (Multicultural Arts Victoria)
- Emerge Festival: event coverage and edit
- Kutcha Edwards: performance coverage and edit
- Talanoa: 13 minute doco about arts performance
- Ladder micro-doco: three minute profile of their program; theme: homelessness
- DHS conference promo
- 'Their Voices': three minute documentary on homelessness; four x 90 second profiles of current projects
- STREAT: launch film; theme: homelessness (a social enterprise providing homeless people with long-term careers in the hospitality industry).
- Media content currently being produced for commercial clients includes:
  - Araluen promotional DVD/webcast
  - Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation promotional DVD/webcast
  - Defence Lake Attack Fun Run promotional DVD/webcast
  - InSite Project documentary and short films
- 'Cook Up': a cooking series DVD for young people moving into independent living (City of Melbourne)
- 'Healthy Relationships': short films exploring youth and health issues made with secondary nurses working in the public education sector (Footscray City HS)
- 'Forgotten Notes': a short documentary about a choir made of elderly people suffering from Alzheimers led by a music therapist
- 'My Girragundji Project': a training program to local indigenous community in Townsville (Office of Arts)
- 'Cultural Strength Mentoring Project (Aboriginal Affairs Victoria) Documenting 6 local projects & mentoring 6 young indigenous filmmakers
- 'Live Up': Independent Living Web series 11 Part pilot series of short web based episodes made by young people for young people covering topics such as 'cook up', 'suit up', 'save up', Clean Up and 'Heads Up'
- 'Multicultural Sports' documentary (Centre for Multicultural Youth)
- 'Connecting To Sea Country' Short Film and Digital stories made in collaboration with students from Thornbury h.s. and VACCA (Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency)
- 'If I Had a Magic Wand...' Short film exploring issues effecting children experiencing homelessness made with MOSS (merri outreach support services)
- 'Celebrating 90 Years' Short doco made for the Lord Mayors Charitable Foundation celebrating 90 years of Philanthropy.

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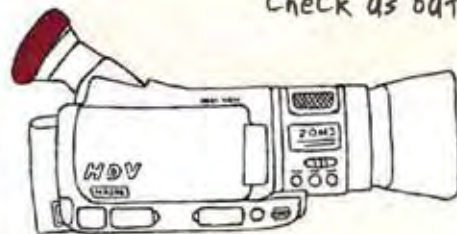


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If you're interested in filmmaking, radio or photography check us out!



**YOUTHWORX** MEDIA

**MEDIA**

**ARTS**

**TRAINING +  
EMPLOYMENT**

**PATHWAYS**

**4 young  
PEOPLE**



Youthworx is a media arts training studio and video production company in Melbourne.