

Harnessing the Potential of Young People: Information on the Connectus Model

Connectus was originally an initiative of the Premier's Drug Prevention Council (PDPC) auspiced by VicHealth. Connectus now operates through the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, Workforce Participation Branch.

Connectus trains and supports young people 16 - 20 years of age to be job-ready for entry-level positions in an industry or to re-engage with education or training. In addition, the program provides young people with access and support from the community, employment and industry sectors.

Connectus provides an opportunity for young people to remain connected by participating in a four week accredited training program (credits toward Certificate 1 in Work Education) and placement into one of the following pathways:

- Traineeships/Apprenticeships
- School based New Apprenticeships
- Employment
- Pre-apprenticeships
- TAFE
- Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
- Secondary School
- Structured Work Place Learning
- Work Experience

HOW CONNECTUS WORKS

Step 1. Recruitment process of young people

A local community provider will be responsible for the coordination of the project at a local level. With the support of Local Learning and Employment Networks, schools, local youth services and Group Training Companies, young people will be recruited and referred to the program.

Step 2. Information Sessions

The Connectus Provider will conduct information sessions in each area prior to the commencement of the pre-employment program. It is critical to work with local agencies and programs to offer these sessions to young people, parents, and other significant adults.

The information session will provide details on:

- Connectus and how the program works;
- The components of the 12 month program;
- Employers and Group Training Companies who are involved;
- Interviews; and
- Program dates and times.

Step 3. Selection Interviews

At the information session, young people interested in participating in the Connectus program will be allocated an interview time. Young people who are selected to participate in the pre-employment program will be notified of their success approximately one – two weeks after the interview process has been completed.

Step 4. Accredited Pre-employment Training Program

Young people will participate in an accredited four week pre-employment program – (Credits toward Certificate 1 in Work Education). The program is delivered by the Connectus Provider and consists of:

- Life skills training (one week);
- Wilderness Week (one week); and
- Employability Skills training (two weeks).

Step 5. Presentation Evening

The presentation evening takes place at the end of the final week of the pre-employment program, and marks the young person's successful completion of the pre-employment program. It is a proud moment as participants share a prepared speech on their individual Connectus experience. Young peoples' families, friends, local community members and employers will be invited to attend the presentation evening and share in the celebration.

Step 6. Individual Support

To ensure that they achieve their career aspirations post the pre employment training, young people will be provided with 11 months individual support by the Connectus Provider. This support includes:

- Individual catch ups with the young person as required;
- Individual contact with the employer/school (if applicable) as required;
- Provision of information and referral to other organisations that can assist the young person to address their needs; and
- Transition Workshop at the eleventh month to support the young person in working through their goals and aspirations post the 12 month program.

Connectus Providers not only remain in regular contact with the young person, but also continue to work with them on building their skills, thus ensuring that they do not become 'disconnected' while working on obtaining employment.

Step 7. Mentoring in the Workplace

Connectus offers mentor training to employers. We strongly encourage employers to provide a mentor for each young person in the workplace, as this will help to ensure a successful experience for both the employer and young person. The Mentor undertakes training with the aim of offering another layer of support to his/her Mentee during and post-program.

Key modules in the Mentor Training include:

- Working with Young people in the 21st Century;
- Communication Skills;
- Team Building;
- Problem Solving/Negotiation Skills; and
- Goal Setting.

The Mentor Training is a valuable form of Professional Development for the mentor. The skills and knowledge acquired are transferable to any professional or personal setting.

Step 8. Pathways

On completion of the pre-employment program Young People can:

- *Continue into a New Apprenticeship/Traineeship* with the support of Connectus, a Group Training Company or an employer for a period of 12 months. With this option the young person's profile and details are marketed to appropriate employers and young people are then supported to attend an interview.
- *Return to school* - with a more developed awareness of the importance of education and what they want to do to achieve their goals
- *Pursue accredited training which will lead to a career pathway (e.g. TAFE)*
There is a lot of social and economic value in keeping a young person connected to community. While some young people who come to the Connectus program choose to graduate into a job, others have used it as a means to build upon their personal skills and capabilities. This enables some Connectus young people to commence training at TAFE or in a pre-apprenticeship.
- *Get a job* - with the support of Connectus and other labour market providers young people can utilise the employability skills they have learnt on program to assist them in pursuing appropriate employment.

Step 9. Transition Workshop (Optional)

The Transition Workshops are designed to ensure the young people are supported with their employment, education or training needs. The young person and Connectus have completed their 12 month relationship and the workshop is to establish closure with the individual young person and the group. By the end of 12 months, some participants have "moved on" and established closure with staff and the group individually. For this reason, the workshop is offered to groups who may attend and will benefit from a formal group closure.

What type of Young Person should be referred to Connectus?

Research suggests that young people who display a number of 'risk factors' are more likely to be at risk of developing problematic drug and alcohol issues in later life. These risk factors include:

- Detachment from school – low attendance levels;
- Academic failure, especially in the middle years;
- Social isolation;
- Behavioural challenges; and
- Uncompetitive in labour market.

Young people that display these risk factors are referred to Connectus.

What type of employer should take on a Connectus participant?

- An employer who is committed to supporting a young person for 12 months or beyond;
- An employer who can allocate/select a mentor with leadership potential for approximately 2 days training/off site activity over 12 months;
- An employer who understands the notion that the trainee will need guidance and support on an ongoing basis;
- An employer who is willing to contribute to the community and to enhance their business' triple bottom line;
- An employer who is open to working collaboratively with Connectus and other community and business organisations such as Group Training Companies; and
- An employer who is committed to professionally developing their own staff.

The success of this model is based on the combination of a variety of interventions and a collaborative approach between Connectus providers, community organisations, employers and mentors.

To find out more information about the Connectus model or Mentor Training please contact Aileen Traynor on 03 9938 0580 or email on aileen.traynor@diird.vic.gov.au.