



Historical Program Overview

Background

Following the joint sitting of the Victorian Parliament in 2001 on drugs, the Premier's Drug Prevention Council (PDPC) was formed. The Victorian parliament, with a bipartisan approach, made a firm commitment to investing in drug prevention initiatives and activities.

Engaging business, media and philanthropic sectors to harness and further support drug prevention activities is a key initiative of the Premier's Drug Prevention Council (PDPC).

Research indicates young people in meaningful jobs are less likely to get involved in drugs and that access to employment is a positive factor in reducing risk taking behaviour. Additionally young people's connection with positive adult role models can reduce the risk of problematic drug use.

The Connectus Business Advisory Council (BAC) was established by the PDPC in 2002 and together with the PDPC developed Connectus to facilitate the provision of training, employment and mentoring opportunities for "at risk" young people by the business sector.

In 2003 a commitment of \$500,000 per annum over three years was made by the PDPC to the business initiative. The Premier and the Minister for Health indicated their support for the program at a business lunch attended by 100 business people at Queens Hall in July 2004.

- Connectus is a preventative initiative that involves business, government, and the community and employment sectors in the provision of the program in a number of local communities across metropolitan Melbourne.
- Connectus is a unique prevention program offering a range of employment, education or training pathways to young people disengaged or disengaging from education.

Target Group

Given the focus of the PDPC, it was recommended that this program target 'at-risk' young people. In this context 'at-risk' young people are defined as those having difficulty at school or currently engaged with existing employment or support agencies, and who are not competitive in the labour force.

Specifically the target group is young people aged between 16–20 who are experiencing one or more of the following risk factors:

- chronic truancy
- risk of expulsion
- family issues
- disruptive behaviour
- poor communication skills
- low level numeracy and literacy skills.

This program is not for young people with a drug or alcohol addiction.

The Program

Young people are recruited through existing networks including Local Learning Employment Networks (LLENs), Secondary Colleges, Youth Services and Local Government. Young people then participate in an interview to further explain the program and ensure the program is appropriate match for them.

Young people participate in a four week accredited Pre Employment Training Program (with credits toward Certificate 1 in Work Education), preparing them for entry level positions in the workplace, or for return to school or further training:

- Week 1 – Like Skills
- Week 2 – Wilderness Week (implementing Life Skill concepts)
- Weeks 3 & 4 – Employability Skills

The young people are also provided an opportunity to interview for a traineeship or apprenticeship. Ongoing support is provided to both employers and employees by the Connectus staff through regular contact and a mentoring program. If participants choose to return to school or pursue training, Connectus staff continue to provide support to them and liaise with any service providers involved with the young person.

Connectus Outcomes

As of June 2007, Connectus has established partnerships and delivered programs in the following communities:

- Altona
- Casey
- Dandenong
- Hume
- Inner North
- Melton
- South West Victoria (in partnership with Southwest & WynBay LLEN)

Thirteen pilot programs were delivered in these areas with 147 participants completing the Connectus pre-employment program.

Outcomes of the thirteen pilot programs:

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| • Number of young people that completed projects: | 147 |
| • Number of young people in Apprenticeships/Employment | 55 (38%) |
| • Number of young people in Education or Training | 62 (42%) |
| • Number of young people needing additional support | 30 (20%) |

Aim of Connectus

To minimise risk taking behaviour in young people 16-20 years of age who are disengaged from education by providing access to employment, education and training opportunities and support from the community, employment and business sectors.

The support takes place over 12 months enabling the young person to participate in education, employment or training activities that maximize social and economic independence.

Connectus Principles

The way in which we work with young people, council members and stakeholders is underpinned by a commitment to:

Advocacy: In a society where division and injustice exist, Connectus will advocate for the needs of young people as individuals and as a group of people to ensure a just and fair society.

Empowerment: Connectus will at all times nurture others so that they have the confidence and self determination to make choices and achieve their personal goals, social and economic independence.

Fun: Connectus staff and stakeholders will ensure that all activities are delivered in a manner that promotes learning in an enjoyable, engaging and safe environment.

Integrity: Connectus staff and stakeholders will live out the vision of Connectus adopting a client centered approach that respects individuality and difference.

Team Work: Connectus will foster a spirit of belonging, community, cooperation and active participation in the delivery of all its activities.