



# From participation to leadership

## Evaluation of the Community Service Leadership Program

Martina Boese

2010



Brotherhood  
of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty



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## **Abbreviations**

BSL	Brotherhood of St Laurence
CALD	culturally and linguistically diverse
CAS	Collingwood Alternative School
CERES	Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies
CSLP	Community Service Leadership Program
EMC	Ecumenical Migration Centre
MWHC	Multicultural Centre for Women's Health
NMIT	Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE
TLC	Teamwork Leadership Communication
YAMEC	Young Adult Migrant Education Course

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## Summary

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of the Community Service Leadership Program (CSLP), a partnership project between the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Rotary Club of Melbourne. The broad aim of the CSLP is to encourage the development of skills and motivation among disadvantaged young people to become leaders in the field of community service.

The evaluation was undertaken by BSL Research and Policy Centre staff from May to November 2008. It focuses on the school-based learning component which aimed to provide an opportunity for disadvantaged young people in education settings to identify, plan, implement and evaluate meaningful projects to benefit their local community.

CSLP aims to help disadvantaged young people to contribute positively to the community and enhance their own skills and personal development. The literature shows firstly that community participation offers a range of benefits both to the individual and to the wider community and secondly that young people do not all have equal opportunity to participate in the community. Young people who have disengaged from mainstream education or who have arrived recently in Australia as migrants and refugees are often excluded from the benefits of civic engagement. The program addresses this dimension of social exclusion by providing disadvantaged young people with an avenue for youth-led participation and inquiry-based project learning.

Participating educational settings were the Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT) and Collingwood Alternative School (CAS). Community organisations involved in the CSLP through visits or student projects included Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR), the Collingwood Leisure Centre, CERES, Down Syndrome Victoria, the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MWHC), Westside Circus, Wheelchair Australia, and the BSL's Coolibah Centre and Ecumenical Migration Centre.

CSLP was mapped to the curriculum of the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) to be assessed within the Work Related Skills and Personal Development Skills streams.

The evaluation assessed outcomes against the following list of projected outcomes:

- to have facilitated a number of projects conducted by young people in their communities, as part of their school curriculum
- to have created a sustainable positive relationship between young people and organisations and services in their community
- to have enhanced the meaning for young people of civic and social responsibility and empathy
- to have enhanced the wellbeing of disadvantaged young people by empowering them to identify and implement positive change in their community, thereby proving that they can be instigators of positive change
- to have enhanced young people's employability and communication skills
- to have encouraged a positive attitude in young people towards their future. This may include an increased attachment to education, and to future training and employment pathways as a result of their participation in the program.

## Methodology

The evaluation assessed the extent to which the program managed to generate positive outcomes for its participants. It was guided by the following questions:

- How many projects have been successfully completed?
- What are the outcomes of participating in the project for young people?
- What is the feedback from project partners including schools and community partners?

- What is the feedback from young people?
- Has the public perception of young people in the area been enhanced?

The research followed a qualitative approach, based on the small sample of participants and the character of the program and its projected outcomes. Data was gathered mainly through focus groups and interviews. Four focus groups, two at each program site, were conducted with student participants. Interviews were conducted with three teachers and two representatives of community organisations as well as with three program staff (coordinator, two volunteers).

Participation in the facilitator training as well as in meetings with teachers, and in the final project presentations and celebrations, complemented the information gathered through focus groups and interviews. Regular meetings with the program coordinator assisted ongoing reflection on emerging issues and challenges as well as update on decisions regarding the program implementation and development of resources.

## **Program model**

The CSLP aims to benefit young people by developing social and civic responsibility and empathy and key employment and communication skills, encouraging a positive and sustained connection between young people and their community, and increasing the wellbeing of young people by empowering them as active creators of positive change in their community.

The program follows a community service learning model, which is a teaching and learning strategy in which students participate in an activity in the community which they have planned and reflected on as part of their school learning (ECS 1999).

The CSLP variant of service learning has been adapted from the Working Community model, first piloted in four government schools in the western suburbs of Melbourne in 2000. Like Working Community, the CSLP owes much of its values and structure to the work of educational consultant Dave Turner and others who developed the principles through various programs both in the UK and Australia since the 1970s.

The CSLP built on the Working Community model by trialling it in the context of severe disadvantage, with the key aim of empowering marginalised young people with a foundation of skills, knowledge and ambition to become future leaders in the community service sector.

The model is structured in five phases to build leadership and learning. It begins with a student induction (phase 1), followed by visits to community organisations which the students help to organise and conduct themselves (phase 2). Phase 3 consists of skills workshops in which the students develop self-confidence, leadership, teamwork and communication skills. In phase 4 the students work in teams on community projects on a social issue they have identified as important. The program finishes with project presentations and celebrations.

The role of the teachers and the students changes in the course of the program from a teacher-led to a student-led process of learning. To assist this process, two training modules introduce the participating teachers to the teaching and learning principles that guide the model.

## **Benefits for students, schools and the community**

The pilot was able to engage a fluctuating number of 17 students within the Young Adult Migrant Education Course (YAMEC)<sup>1</sup> at NMIT and 10 to 12 students at the Collingwood Alternative School (CAS).

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<sup>1</sup> The YAMEC program engages young migrants aged 16 to 26 years ‘who have had disrupted or incomplete schooling in their country of origin and young migrants who have been out of the school system for a long time and may find secondary schools inappropriate’ (course description).

Both groups of students are facing sets of complex disadvantage. Issues for young people at NMIT included weak English skills, low literacy, disrupted education, economic disadvantage, family breakdown and fragmentation, housing insecurity, visa insecurity and early pregnancy. For CAS students, issues included family violence and breakdown, low literacy levels, prior juvenile offences, a history of poor school engagement and learning disabilities.

As the program targets disadvantaged groups, the issues and barriers to participation were taken into consideration at the beginning of the program development phase to ensure that the program was flexible and could be adapted to accommodate their impact on the students' ability to engage with the program on an ongoing level. Some students joined the program midway and several students dropped out of their course during the program; and some students' attendance was low and inconsistent, reflecting the difficulties this student cohort experiences in remaining engaged with the education system. However the majority of the students remained engaged throughout the program and completed their projects.

Five community projects were initiated, planned and implemented by the students, as part of their school curriculum:

YAMEC students at NMIT:

- organised and ran a multicultural picnic in a park, including multicultural food, an anti-discrimination quiz and basketball game. Participants were students from CAS and NMIT
- organised a workshop on sexual health and self-defence for culturally and linguistically diverse women run by the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MWHC)
- organised and ran an environment education workshop addressed to non-English speaking students, focusing on energy saving, waste reduction, recycling and water saving, including student presentation and practical activities

Students from CAS:

- prepared a young people's gym schedule for the Collingwood Leisure Centre, based on a student-run survey of culturally and linguistically diverse NMIT students
- designed and prepared an exhibition of artwork and interviews with members of the BSL Coolibah Centre catering for marginalised older people.

Through those projects, the students developed skills in teamwork, web research, IT use, professional (phone) communication, project management, organisation and presentation of work progress and outcomes in a project with a timeline that extends beyond usual classroom activities. Many participants reported that they had completed such tasks for the first time in their lives.

The focus groups showed also that students gained a better understanding of the meaning of community and opportunities for contributing to community, as well as of relevant local social issues, both through research and through meeting representatives of organisations that are operating in the students' self-identified interest areas (environment, disability, racism, sexual health, homelessness).

Students and teachers indicated a number of significant improvements for students as a result of their participation in the CSLP, particularly in self-confidence, self-esteem, communication skills both within and beyond their usual social contacts, teamwork, planning and organisation skills.

Teachers also reported that they had observed positive outcomes in the attitudes and wellbeing of many young people: increased empathy and engagement, more initiative and a more positive future outlook, improved sense of self and wellbeing.

Through their participation in the CSLP, the teachers became engaged in a pedagogy that enabled them to empower young people to actively discuss issues in the community in a safe and supportive environment. In this process, previously unaddressed issues students are facing in the community

(such as racism or other forms of abuse) came to the fore. The program's strongly participatory character furthered teachers' understanding of their students' capabilities, which in turn had positive outcomes for the students' self-confidence and progress. For example, in one team students undertook a survey analysis independently, where a teacher expected them to need his assistance.

The CSLP model of community engagement ensured that schools built external links and relationships with community organisations. The successful collaboration encouraged them to maintain these links and consider future collaboration with those organisations. Recent state and federal policy documents recognise the need for promoting the mutual engagement of schools and communities (DEECD 2008; Council of Australian Governments 2008).

Representatives of community organisations observed positive outcomes for the community such as improved connections between older community members and young people; the input of youth voices (peer research by young people with young people) to a community leisure facility that would help to better engage young people; and increased openness of people of different cultural backgrounds through informal exchange as well as research information gathering.

The interviewed stakeholders were open to future involvement in the program and considered it a worthwhile approach to link schools and community organisations with each other and thereby strengthen young people's sense of belonging and ownership in their community, as well as their capacity to contribute.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the experience and the resources developed within the pilot phase, the following recommendations can be made for the future program development:

- Further planning should be invested into adapting the program for different settings.
- The program schedule needs to be made more flexible so that staff in individual educational settings can adapt its length and intensity (e.g. make it shorter and more intense).
- Teacher training needs to take place at an earlier stage, preferably run by the coordinator of the program, and to focus on applied learning based on examples and experiences from the pilot.
- All participating teachers should be involved in the planning from the start, to ensure their ownership of the program and to negotiate their exact role alongside the program coordinator's. Different arrangements are likely to be negotiated with different settings (school, TAFE) depending on resources and student cohorts.
- It may be helpful to have a network of participating schools/teachers with scheduled meetings to ensure ongoing feedback and reflection on experience and emerging issues.
- The induction event for students should include more practical/hands-on elements for students and be facilitated by the same persons who will lead the program afterwards. If participating schools/TAFE agree on a joint event, it should take place at an external site.
- The student resource pack needs to be further developed, preferably by an expert in preparing resources for culturally and linguistically diverse groups with low English speaking levels. Examples from the pilot should be included to better illustrate the program and a glossary with key terms added.
- The teachers may be helped through small booklets for each phase of the program, presenting the relevant process and aims of the phase in an easily accessible format.
- Community organisations to be involved should preferably be those with education officers or other suitably qualified staff. Organisations that provide scope for hands-on engagement of young participants would accommodate well the applied learning approach in the program.
- Community organisations should be involved in the planning phase to assess scope for projects and provide them with the bigger picture of the program.



- Additional funding may be needed for the program coordinator (0.8 position required) and facilitators (now reliant on volunteers) if replicated in a TAFE. The role of the external coordinator is important in providing ongoing guidance and support, as well as community links to the participating sites. However its exact scope varies according to contributions of the participating educational settings. This needs to be considered in the budget.
- Further leadership opportunities beyond the program should be conceived in partnership with the Rotary Club of Melbourne to increase the sustainability of the program outcomes for its participants, e.g. linking the graduates with community-based work experiences or mentors.
- Additional funding for the evaluation would allow longitudinal perspectives on CSLP effectiveness through follow up with the students. Furthermore, further research is needed on teachers' expectations of and experience with pedagogies that include the community.

## **Conclusion**

The evaluation reveals that the CSLP led to positive outcomes for most students and also for the participant program sites. Important immediate outcomes for students included an enhanced understanding of civic and social responsibility and increased empathy through their experience with community service learning. The students also showed increased self-confidence and wellbeing. These, combined with the students' empowerment and increase in social capital, are likely to have long-term outcomes which could only be measured at a later stage.

Outcomes also included improved communication and teamwork, and improved planning and organisation skills, which have also increased the young participants' employability. Stakeholders both at the program sites and in the community suggested that the program generates positive outcomes for the individuals as well as for other members of the community and for participating schools.



## **I Introduction**

Since March 2008, the Brotherhood of St Laurence has coordinated and supported the implementation of a Community Service Leadership Program (CSLP). The pilot has been developed together with the Rotary Club of Melbourne (RCM) and funded by the RCM and the Lord Mayors Fund. The aim of the CSLP is to develop the skills and motivation among disadvantaged young people to become leaders in the field of community service.

The evaluation focused on the school based learning component which aimed to provide an opportunity for disadvantaged young people in schools to identify, plan, implement and evaluate meaningful projects to benefit their local community.

The program follows a service learning model, which is a teaching and learning strategy in which students participate in an activity in the community which they have planned and reflected on as part of their school learning (ECS 1999).

The CSLP variant of service learning has been adapted from the Working Community model, first piloted in four government schools in the western suburbs of Melbourne in 2000. Like Working Community, the CSLP owes much of its values and structure to the work of educational consultant Dave Turner and others who developed the principles through various programs both in the UK and Australia since the 1970s.

The pilot was run in two settings: Collingwood Alternative School (CAS) and the Young Adult Migrant Education Course (YAMEC) at NMIT.

## **2 Literature review**

### **Community participation**

Community participation has long been recognised as offering a number of benefits both to the participating individual and to the community. At the individual level, these include an increase in self-esteem and development of skills, knowledge and networks; at the community level, they include an increase in social capital and the reduction or fulfilment of community needs (Putnam 2000; ECS 1999).

Evidence of the importance and value of participatory approaches for young people is emerging in the fields of youth studies, health promotion and prevention as well as education (see references in Holdsworth 2007). Reasons advanced in support of youth participation range from the technical and pragmatic to the educational, human rights, democratic and transformative.

Governments internationally and in Australia have shown their recognition of the merits of youth civic and social participation through a number of recent youth engagement initiatives such as Student Action Teams in Victoria (Holdsworth et al. 2004, 2005) as well as various declarations in favour of promoting youth participation. In the context of the welfare state, community participation is also viewed as assisting young people's transition through school to work by enabling the development of transferable work skills (McClure 2000). Volunteering, a key form of community participation, has been found to benefit young people through improving their self-esteem and increasing their social networks (Pope 2006). It may also mitigate economic disadvantage by connecting people to improved career pathways (Smith 2001).

### **Barriers to participation in community service**

While social connectedness, through meaningful participation in the community such as volunteering, has been identified as important to the development of young people, disadvantaged young people have been shown to have unequal access to civic and social engagement opportunities compared with their more advantaged peers (Boese & Scutella 2006).

For some time, scholarly criticism has pointed to governments' failure to recognise the obstacles young people experience when trying to participate socially, economically and politically (Bessant 2004). Victoria's youth policy agenda *Future directions* (Department of Planning and Community Development 2006) has responded to some of that criticism by restating the government's commitment to 'make efforts to build capacity to draw diverse young people together, enabling them to lead change for themselves and their communities', for example through funds for youth-led activities in disadvantaged communities. The more recent *Vulnerable Youth Framework discussion paper* recognises the importance of youth participation in community planning processes, naming the inclusion of young people in developing and delivering services as one example (DHS, DPCD & DEECD 2008). The paper also suggests the implementation of 'processes that support vulnerable young people to actively participate in local networks including developing local-level youth plans' (p.25). The focus here, however, is on improving service delivery for young people.

The existing models of youth engagement and participation in the community and leadership have however largely failed to consider the preferences and needs of young people from CALD backgrounds, thus compounding the barriers these young people experience (Collin & Blanchard 2008; Holdsworth et al. 2007). These and other disadvantaged young people have unequal access to civic and social engagement. Volunteering activity correlates, for example, with higher socioeconomic status, English as home language, high literacy and higher participation in education (Brown et al. 2003). Young migrants and refugees often face additional barriers such as a lack of familiarity with Australian systems and local opportunities. Furthermore, young refugees in particular often have other priorities related to housing, language learning and financial support, are juggling study and part-time jobs, and very often assist their parents with translating and other responsibilities. Finally, young people of refugee or CALD backgrounds hold diverse understandings about participation in different cultural contexts (Singer & Chandra-Shekeran 2006; CMYI 2001).

Based on these barriers, it is clear that a one-size-fits-all framework of addressing youth civic and social engagement simply will not work. The participatory disadvantages of particular groups of young people need to be considered in a successful program design. And, crucially, young people need to be 'informed of opportunities, encouraged to participate, supported to take part and understand the context and outcomes of their participation' (Oloff 2006, p.2).

The literature shows that existing strategies of promoting youth participation tend to be dominated by a youth development approach with a focus on life skills. Exceptions are those projects with a strong community development ethos or partnerships with youth-oriented community organisations (Bell, Vromen & Collin 2008).

## **Community service learning**

Service learning is a teaching and learning strategy that has been defined as a 'course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organised service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and enhanced sense of civic responsibility' (Bringle & Hatcher 1995, p.112, quoted in Bringle 2005, p.107).

In contrast to community *service* where young people may be involved in community activity devised and organised by others, in community *service learning* they have a voice in planning and reflecting on the activity as part of their school learning (ECS, 1999). The service learning model has indeed been found to have more positive benefits for students than does participating in typical volunteer community service (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000 quoted in Smith 2008). Finally, Nelson and Eckstein (2008, p.225) described it as 'one way of reconstructing educators' thinking about at-risk adolescents capitalising on their positive assets and the possibilities and potential therein'.

### **3 Methodology**

In addition to the primarily qualitative data generated by the evaluation (see below), the researchers built on a literature review undertaken during the program development, and reviewed more recent research on young people's community participation and engagement strategies.

Throughout the pilot, the development and implementation of the program model was documented and reflected upon, via meetings between the researcher and the program coordinator and sometimes with the teachers. Further insights were gained from participating in the facilitator training and meetings with teachers, as well as attending the students' final presentations.

#### **Participant focus groups**

Feedback from student participants was sought through four focus groups. All were invited to contribute. Given the small number of program participants and their fluctuating attendance, the final selection of focus group participants was based on a combination of their written consent, attendance on the day of the focus group and history of participation in the program. The decision for small groups (three to six people) was based on consultation with the class teachers on a useful size. Altogether 19 students participated in the focus groups which took place in the school or TAFE during the regular program session.

The questions focused on the students' feedback about the program overall, as well as specific program components, their learnings from the program and suggestions for change.

Ethics approval of the research was sought from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and through the BSL's ethics process prior to contacting the students for their consent, and in the case of the CAS students, also their parents to gain consent.

Student focus group participants were compensated with a \$40 shopping voucher.

#### **Interviews with stakeholders and program staff**

Feedback from teachers and other stakeholders in the community was gathered through semi-structured interviews. The participating teachers were interviewed to gain their perspectives on the program outcomes for the students as well as on their experience of the program implementation. The three interviews took place at about the same time as the focus groups with the students, midway through the student-led projects (phase 4).

Two members of community organisations that were involved in the community projects were interviewed just after the final presentations. They served the purpose of gaining insight into the outcomes of the program at the community level.

The program coordinator was interviewed informally on several occasions. Additionally, two of the five volunteers who had worked with the students as program facilitators were interviewed.

All interviews were recorded and partly transcribed.

#### **Limitations of the methodology**

To establish longer term outcomes of youth participation programs like CSLP, it would be necessary to introduce a longitudinal element into the methodology, for example by conducting follow-up interviews with the participants after several months or more (see Holdsworth et al. 2005).

Another reservation concerns the causality of the program in effecting some of the changes in the students stated by the teachers and the students themselves, given other activities at school/ TAFE during the same time period. YAMEC students in particular also participated in a Leadership Program operated by the Red Cross. According to one NMIT staff member, the programs complemented each other and therefore also contributed together to the student outcomes.

## 4 Program participants

The CSLP pilot was able to engage fluctuating numbers of 17 students within the Young Adult Migrant Education Course (YAMEC)<sup>2</sup> at NMIT and 10 to 12 students at the Collingwood Alternative School (CAS).

Both groups of students are facing sets of complex disadvantage. Issues for young people at NMIT included weak English skills, low literacy, disrupted education, economic disadvantage, family breakdown and fragmentation, housing insecurity, visa insecurity and early pregnancy. For CAS students, issues included history of family violence and breakdown, low literacy levels, prior juvenile offences, a history of poor school engagement, and learning disabilities.

Some students joined the program midway and several students dropped out of their course during the program; some students' attendance was low and inconsistent. However the majority of the students remained engaged and completed their projects.

Differences pertained mainly to two factors, firstly the students' age and level of maturity, secondly their motivation and confidence and thirdly their cultural and linguistic background.

Firstly, the YAMEC students were between 17 and 25 years old, while the CAS students were aged between 15 and 16 years. While this may not seem a significant difference, the teachers' characterisations of their students suggest otherwise. Many students from NMIT were living out of home, working part-time and had core family responsibilities. The cohort from CAS did not bear such responsibility at home or in the community, were younger and showed lower levels of maturity.

Secondly, the students' levels of self-motivation were clearly lower among CAS students, where the issue of student disengagement was quite prevalent. A CAS teacher described the students as 'quite reticent because of bad education experiences in the past'.

The differing levels of motivation and engagement impacted significantly on the way CSLP was implemented in the two settings. As one of the CAS teachers put it:

The school supported it and if it doesn't have that level ... of focus for the teachers, a major area of focus, it wouldn't run. Unless you had kids who are very self-motivated, self-driven and self-starters, where you could say: 'Right, who wants to do that community project? I'll give you the information. Come back to me with the things!'

Thirdly, the program posed an additional challenge for the YAMEC students who are from a non-English speaking background. Their migrant or refugee background (in some cases very recent) meant that many features of Australian society including networks and community structures, including different forms of civic participation, were novel to many of the students. The experience of being separate from family or having lost family members added further challenges to some of their lives.

The following community organisations were involved in CSLP through either visits by the students or to the schools (as part of phase 2) or through the student projects (in Phase 4):

- Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR)
- Collingwood Leisure Centre
- Coolibah House
- Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies (CERES)
- Down Syndrome Victoria

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<sup>2</sup> The YAMEC program engages young migrants aged 16 to 26 years 'who have had disrupted or incomplete schooling in their country of origin and young migrants who have been out of the school system for a long time and may find secondary schools inappropriate' (course description).

- Ecumenical Migration Centre
- Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MWHC)
- Westside Circus
- Wheelchair Australia.

## 5 How did it work?

CSLP was run in weekly sessions that were integrated into the VCAL curriculum of the participating sites within the Work Related Skills and Personal Development Skills streams. Each session was matched with specific VCAL Learning Outcomes. The principal facilitators of the program were the class teachers.

The program coordinator who was employed by the BSL had responsibilities in both the development and the implementation of the program. Development tasks included devising a program plan, identifying and establishing partnerships with schools and other possible educational sites in conjunction with the Rotary Club of Melbourne, fostering partnerships with community organisations and coordinating the design of the project learning materials. The coordinator's role in implementation was to train and support the teachers, organise and convene regular meetings with the facilitators to discuss workshops and shared experiences, serve as a contact person and support for the facilitators, schools and community partners, and work with the Rotary Club and the BSL to design an evaluation.

The distribution of input between teachers and program coordinator varied strongly between the two participating educational settings. The CAS teachers ran the program fairly independently, supported initially (in phases 1 and 2) by the program coordinator, as well as by visiting speakers and a hip hop artist with a background in working with disadvantaged young people who ran workshops with the students. At NMIT the program coordinator ran the sessions together with two volunteers (in phase 4), supported by the class teacher.

The duration of the program in the pilot was 20 weeks from the Kick Off Day to the final presentations and celebrations.

At the YAMEC VCAL, which operates for 36 weeks at 25 hours per week, CSLP was run once a week for about three hours. It is worth noting that some students chose to engage in program activities (such as visiting community organisations) also outside the allocated time slot in the course, including their holidays. The high level of commitment of these students indicates their enthusiasm for the CSLP. However it also shows the need for flexibility as external partners cannot not always fit around the times allocated for the program.

At CAS the program was generally run on two days per week, consisting of two 45-minute sessions. Towards the end of the program, especially while preparing the students' community projects (phase 4), the timetable was managed more flexibly to allow necessary tasks to be completed also at other times.

In both settings, the facilitating teachers referred to the content or learning from the CSLP in other sessions they ran with the student participants.

The following section discusses the different components of the program in turn, followed by recommendations for a future program implementation.

### **Main program components: what's in it for the students?**

CSLP includes five phases: a student induction (phase 1), community visits (phase 2), skills workshops (phase 3), student-led community projects (phase 4) and presentations joined with celebrations (phase 5).

While phase 1, 2 and 3 culminate in events which take place on one day each, their preparation and post-event reflection justifies their description as phases.

### **Phase I: Student induction**

The purpose of this phase was to introduce the Community Service Leadership Program to its student participants by engaging them in an inquiry about their interests, passions and social concerns and the meaning of community. It also covered the importance of a shared vision, communication and confidence to achieve outcomes. Phase 1 spanned three weeks, with the Kick Off Day in the middle, framed by an introductory class and debrief sessions.

In the course of planning the details of the program structure, the program coordinator discussed with the participating teachers the possibility of running the Kick Off Day as a joint event, but there were some doubts about the possible negative impact on the students. This assessment seemed to be based on the students' characteristics—on the one hand, older first-generation migrant Australians from diverse cultural backgrounds at NMIT and on the other, younger, Anglo, Indigenous and second or third-generation migrant Australian students from CAS with some difficulties in engaging with educational and other social environments. Based on this discussion, separate induction days took place on different days at CAS and NMIT<sup>3</sup>. There was a strong feeling that the students needed to feel comfortable with the CSLP and its purpose in their own classroom environment before linking with students from other environments. Retrospectively, one of the teachers was more optimistic about the possibility of a joint induction event.

The structure of the Kick Off Day was similar in both settings. It started with a drumming workshop, followed by an introduction to the program by representatives of the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Rotary Club of Melbourne, presentations by speakers from different community organisations who explored examples of community engagement, and a workshop session. For both events a facilitator was engaged with a background in student-led community projects through the Education Foundation's ruMAD program<sup>4</sup>.

At NMIT the event included a video presentation on the community work done by Oxfam. A speaker from the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) ran a workshop on young leadership.

At CAS the induction included a presentation by the manager of the BSL's Coolibah Centre and a presentation by Blue SKYS Media, the media education branch of St Kilda Youth Services.

In both sessions, students identified and discussed a number of community issues they cared about and suggested some initial ideas for projects. Areas of concern included racism, loneliness, climate change, safety for children, environment protection, war, sports activities, health and family. Ideas for projects included creating safer environments for children, organising dance programs for primary school kids, environment protection, smoking and drug prevention, encouraging young people to exercise, get interpreters into hospitals.

Asked to identify what they learned on the day, students mentioned the need to: support each other, be tolerant, not be afraid to ask questions, be part of the program, be involved in different cultures.

### *Findings and recommendations*

#### Joint induction event for all participating sites would be beneficial<sup>5</sup>.

If managed correctly and safely, a joint induction event would increase the scale of the event, which would facilitate holding the event in an external setting and recruiting external speakers from different community organisations.

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<sup>4</sup> RuMAD describes itself as 'a toolkit enables young people to lead social change and become active citizens. It is focused on values and led by students but benefits the whole community' (program website <http://www.rumad.org.au/>).

<sup>5</sup> The Working community model, from which the CSLP has been adapted, foresees such a joint event.



Furthermore, it would begin the process of taking the students out of their comfort zone and instigate a sense of the program being 'bigger' than their school, and including other young people in the community.

An external site for induction event would be desirable.

Holding the induction event partly at an external site would symbolise from the start that the program is about the wider community even though most of the work will physically take place within the school. Given that resources are limited, if the schools do not agree on a joint event, it might be possible at least to *start* the event in an external location.

Hands-on activities were very effective and could be increased.

Both students and teachers—agreed that the hands-on activities especially the drumming workshop were highly successful in engaging the student participants. In fact the drumming workshop was the single thing that all students remembered most from the day. More of those and similar activities scattered throughout event would help maintaining the students' engagement and concentration. Teachers and program staff found the rest of the event 'too wordy' or theoretical, which was challenging for some of the students.

I think for those guys to sit down for that period of time and focus on a range of speakers, I think that's probably quite possible in Brighton Grammar or something but I think they needed a bit more 'OK, we're going off to do another physical thing', and then come back and keep it all short sharp and sweet. I think they came out of it understanding we're involved in something, it's a project, something about community but needed a few dots filled in. And we've sort of been trying to do that, fill in the dots as we go. [Teacher]

Shorter sessions and more breaks during the induction event would be more suitable.

The session length stretched the attention span of students in both settings, but especially at CAS, where the students are used to 45-minute sessions. Shorter sessions and more breaks would aid students' concentration and allow them more time for socialising within the day.

Examples of student projects from the pilot should be included.

A presentation on previous projects from the pilot phase of the program would work very well on two levels. Firstly, it would illustrate to the students what this program is about, more than abstract references to community engagement. Secondly, it would encourage students to see what their peers have been able to achieve and make the process and outcomes more tangible and achievable.

Including fewer speakers might be less daunting.

One teacher noted that the students were almost outnumbered by the speakers, who were strangers to them. It may be desirable to reduce the number of speakers to those people who continue to play an active role in the program. On the other hand, the inclusion of community speakers and their stories was very effective in capturing students' interest and imagination of what community engagement and the CSLP are about. Those real-life examples seemed to convey more about the program's content to the students than the more theoretical presentations.

## **Phase 2: Community visits**

In this 4-week phase the students learned about the community sector. They started off by identifying social issues they are interested in and discussing how they might be resolved and which community organisations are addressing those issues. The students then prepared to make their contact with a community organisation by practising mock telephone conversations with each other and developing questionnaires before ringing the organisation of their choice to arrange a visit. To facilitate this, the CSLP program coordinator had contacted the selected community organisations beforehand to advise them of the program, so that the telephone contact would be successful. During their visit to the community organisation, the students asked questions about the organisation and about associated career opportunities, and wrote the information into a community report which was then presented to the rest of the class.

The program coordinator set up an online database on community organisations in the students' areas of interest (cslp.pbwiki.com) which facilitated the students' search. The students browsed the home pages of different organisations, before they contacted the organisations to arrange a visit.

CAS and YAMEC took slightly different approaches in this phase. YAMEC staff took a more exploratory approach, visiting the community organisations following on from the students' research and interest, while the CAS staff pursued a more strategic approach, visiting organisations they expected to work with in the course of the community projects.

The table below lists the community organisations visited by (V) or visiting (H) the students during phase 2:

**Table 5.1 Community organisation visits**

<b>NMIT YAMEC group</b>	<b>Collingwood Alternative School</b>
EMC (V)	Wheelchair Victoria (H)
ANTaR (V)	Collingwood Leisure Centre (V)
Down Syndrome Association (V)	Coolibah Centre (V)
Reach (V)	

### *Findings and recommendations*

This phase of the program offered benefits both to the students as well as to the participating community organisations.

The research component, which helped the students to identify resources in the community, should be retained

Most students including all of the YAMEC students showed they had learned about the strong presence and variety of community organisations only through participating in this program. Their teachers observed the students' surprise at the range of available services and initiatives in their local community.

Support for IT learning in the course of the online research could be further strengthened

Teachers or program staff in both settings described the challenge for the students engaging in online research on community resources. It became clear that to firstly source relevant sites and then to identify the needed information on those sites was a difficult task for many students, which needed considerable support.

Practice of telephone skills and communication skills more broadly is vital and should be maintained.

Preparing a telephone conversation and actually executing the call to a professional organisation was for many students, especially those of non-English speaking backgrounds, a significant hurdle to overcome.

S: It was the first time I called a community organisation ... I was nervous. And the second time I wasn't nervous anymore, I had my words in my brain and was fluid.

Q: So now you think you can do it?

S: Yeah.

At a very basic level, the community visits required the students to relate to people and situations not familiar to them. One of the students described her feelings about her initial visit to the Coolibah Centre:

That was scary. They didn't explain exactly what we were supposed to be doing. They just said: 'Give them their food and then bring their plates after they finished'. But we had to go round and ask everybody what they wanted.

Learning about active citizenship through interaction with groups external to the schools is a core element that needs to be strengthened.

Inquiring and learning about the work and structure of community organisations provided the students with a worthwhile introduction into active citizenship. Through the community visits as well as the contact with volunteers involved in the program, the students gained insights into what 'community participation' and engagement can mean. They learned about social issues and their interpretation, as well as how they were being addressed by a specific community organisation. Finally, students learned about the objectives, structures, resources and strategies of community organisations. For YAMEC students in particular this served as their first introduction into the range of organisations and social issues that are addressed by the community sector in Australia. Teachers at CAS highlighted how valuable the community visits were in taking the students 'away from their insular school environment and their peer group and their own personal issues' and providing them with insights into other worlds, both of organisations and of individuals:

to see how other places run and how other people function ... On that level they've developed some sense of where they sit in the whole picture and also developed feelings of empathy or some feelings of 'Oh that person has had a rough go', just a sense of that. Also a sense that people have a story to tell.

While these experiences might not suddenly change the students' lives, they increased their awareness of other people. According to the teacher this was reflected in classroom discussions where the students showed genuine interest in other people's stories and concerns, such as the life story of a speaker from Wheelchair Victoria who visited CAS. Another example was the students' visit at the Collingwood Leisure Centre where they learned about the swimming pool's design features for people with special physical needs or pool sessions which accommodate Muslim women's religious needs. Learning about such services contributes to the students' understanding of the needs of different community members, which also increases their understanding of their own role as members of the community.

I think it has had an effect but it's not sort of an obvious thing that you see on a daily basis but it's small steps. It's exposure and gaining a sense of perspective. [Teacher]

Community organisations with education officer or similarly suited staff should be preferred.

The pilot has shown that those organisations that have the resources to work with young people are clearly better equipped to be involved in the program and make the community visits a valuable learning experience. These resources would ideally involve outreach work so they can come and visit the schools themselves. Another useful aspect is if the organisation can offer some hands-on activities for the young people to engage in. To name one example, at the Coolibah students spent their first visit serving meals to the Coolibah members.

### **Phase 3: Skills workshop**

Phase three aims at developing the students' leadership and teamwork skills. It evolved over two weeks, beginning with a session of teambuilding activities and the actual skills workshop, which was run by Westside Circus. The lesson preceding the workshop is focused on the role of team composition, effective working relationships and different types of leadership, which the students get to apply during the workshop day, where they engaged in physical activities both together as well as individually.

#### *Findings and recommendations*

Students as well as teachers and volunteers reported very positively on this component of the program. Volunteers and teachers described it as empowering and considered it thereby very successful. Faced with different physical tasks some of which were quite challenging for the students (e.g. building a human pyramid) the students showed themselves to be very supportive and encouraging of each other. Some of them spoke to each other for the first time on this occasion.

When you jump, I was really scared, so my group, my classmates they helped me to do that. So it was so fun.

When you work in the circus you have to trust who you stand up high and you have to trust people who are working with you.

The teachers also commented very favourably on the circus workshops and their outcomes.

I found students who had not smiled before laughing and games are always very effective. ... They spark up with activity with physical activity.

It was a bonding experience for the kids.

Based on the students' and teachers' accounts the circus workshop achieved its aim in consolidating team building skills.

At CAS the skills workshop was complemented by a couple of rap workshops, run by a hip hop artist with a background in working with young people out of the juvenile justice system. The rationale for this step was to include more activities that would help getting the students who showed particularly low self-esteem more involved and more prepared for the teamwork.

Feedback from the focus groups at CAS suggests that the sessions with the hip hop artist were successful in engaging the students and providing them with skills they applied in the course of the project work.

#### **Phase 4: Youth-led community projects**

This phase formed the core of the Community Service Leadership Program and took up the largest share of the time with ten weeks. It included sessions on leadership and communication, values and vision as well as effective teamwork. Students were introduced to project and action planning (including working within timelines and budget) and learned about 'projects that make a difference'. This process also integrated students' presentations of their projects to the class which aimed at receiving feedback to help them to refine their project, in addition to a SWOT analysis<sup>6</sup>. About half of this phase was dedicated to the actual work on the student projects, including planning its documentation. It was in this phase that the teacher-led approach shifted to a student-led approach.

Five projects were planned and carried out by the students, three at YAMEC and two at the CAS:

- a workshop on environmentally aware consumption

Informed by visits at CERES and a Recycling Centre, the students prepared PowerPoint presentations on energy-saving (light bulbs, heating and cooling), recycling (how it works and what can be done) and water-saving for their fellow students. Supported by Environment Victoria, which they contacted during this phase, the students also offered a hands-on demonstration on energy-saving.

- a workshop on sexual health and self-defence

Facilitated by the Multicultural Women's Health Centre and a local Kung Fu Centre, the students organised a workshop for African and Asian women informing on sexual health and teaching basic self-defence.

- an anti-racism picnic, quiz and basketball game in the park

Supported by Lentil As Anything, a local vegetarian organic restaurant run as a not-for-profit community organisation, the students organised a multicultural feast in the park, aimed at attracting students of CALD backgrounds from NMIT and other schools and providing food, music and basketball, as well as a quiz on discrimination, to a culturally diverse crowd.

- an exhibition of paintings and photographs at the Coolibah

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<sup>6</sup> SWOT is a strategic planning method used to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with a project.

Following a few visits, where the students got to know some of the Coolibah members, the student recorded some of those members' stories and took their photographs which they exhibited at the Coolibah Centre alongside some of the artwork they had produced at school.

- a survey and presentation on young people's gym preferences for Collingwood Leisure Centre
- Based on the stated concern about young people's low attendance levels at the Leisure Centre, the students devised a questionnaire for young people on their leisure interests and gym preferences and surveyed about forty young people of CALD and low SES backgrounds at NMIT. They presented the survey results survey to staff at the Leisure Centre.

#### *Findings and recommendations*

As with phase 2, there were differences between the two program sites in the implementation of phase 4. At YAMEC the project work took place in distinct groups with the same members over time, while the CAS students followed a more flexible model, where most students were involved in both projects through some contribution such as designing a survey, putting a PowerPoint presentation together, taking photos. This flexible approach was more accommodating to students stepping in for each other in times of absences.

For a future implementation of the program, it is vital to allow for such flexibility. The age and maturity of the students as well as their self-motivation levels are important parameters to be considered by the teachers as program facilitators.

Experience at YAMEC also showed that the separation into different fixed teams can put the continuity of the project work at risk, where irregular attendance is an issue. While attendance level cannot be predicted for every single student, it is vital that every team includes at least one or two students with more leadership potential who can be expected to commit to the project.

#### **Phase 5: Presentations and celebrations**

This phase of CSLP was dedicated to the presentations of the projects, their documentation and reflection. Scheduled to run over three weeks, it culminated in the presentation of the projects to the program partners, which allowed the students to reflect on how the skills they developed related to the world of work, and the celebration of completion, including an awards ceremony. A final debrief session encouraged students' reflection on their performance and outcomes achieved, particularly reflection on their teamwork, leadership and communication (TLC) skills, and the evaluation of their effectiveness, based on a review of the weekly reflective diary and notes taken throughout the program.

#### *Findings and recommendations*

Phase 5 closed the circle in the sense of the program opening up again to a wider group of people, including several representatives of the funding bodies. While some students felt rather nervous before making their work more public, most faced up well to the task and practised their communication skills and bridging social capital in communicating about their projects with various stakeholders.

In the case of one community project, the day of final presentations and celebrations coincided with a presentation to another community organisation. It is noteworthy that the newly acquired teamwork skills and group ethos facilitated the presentation by a student who had been less involved in the project but was ready to jump in for a missing presenter.

#### Further support or link with graduates should be provided.

Further thought needs to be given to linking the CSLP graduates to other forms of supported engagement, for example, community-based work experience, leadership opportunities or mentoring.

## **Student pack**

The students were given at the start a workbook which included worksheets for every session, templates for recording discussion and planning outcomes, for interviews during the community organisation visits and a reflective journal. This resource had been adapted from the Working Community resource by a registered teacher who volunteered on the program, in collaboration with the program coordinator.

### *Findings and recommendations*

The student pack was generally described as useful. However it would need further adaptation for non-English speaking participants. For NESB students in the pilot, the level of English language was found to be too complex, requiring additional input from the teachers and volunteer facilitators in ‘translating’ to a more basic level. It would be easier for the teachers to add complexity to simpler material if necessary than the other way round; and it would prevent an ad hoc translation by the teacher changing the content of the material.

Now the pilot has been completed, it would be beneficial to future CSLP participants to update the student pack to include examples from the pilot, both of the concerns and social issues identified by the pilot participants as well as of the projects. The resource would be further improved by including more pictorial material and a glossary that explains key terms such as ‘community’, ‘participation’, ‘community sector’.

## **What resources did the teachers have?**

Teachers play a fundamental role in the program, as communicators of content and by enabling—through a particular pedagogical approach—the students to bring their skills and ideas to the fore. This means firstly teachers need to be sufficiently familiar with community participation and the community sector to introduce the students to these areas. Secondly and just as importantly, they need to facilitate the students’ learning by allowing them to develop initiative and independence in identifying issues, gathering resources, finding solutions and contributing to activities to resolve the issue.

The teachers’ practice shapes the context and nature of the learning process in which the students are engaging. According to the Working Community model on which CSLP is based, the learning process is intended to evolve from one that is teacher-led to one that is student-led; but this ideal needs to be adapted to the actual students’ level of independence, maturity and capabilities. The specific pedagogy of the program may require teachers to modify their usual approach to accommodate the students’ increasing independence. It may change the teachers’ perception of the students and their capabilities, and they may need to engage in a process of teaching that challenges their philosophy, knowledge and experience. Some teachers saw this as a positive opportunity to develop a new approach to teaching to add to their repertoire.

To support the teachers, CSLP provided the following resources:

- training before the start of the program (referred to as *Pre-program training* here) and before phase 4 where students start working on the community projects (referred to as *Facilitator training*)
- Ongoing support through the program coordinator
- A Teacher resource mapping the outcomes to aspects of the VCAL curriculum

## **Pre-program training**

The initial training occurred as a two-day workshop at the BSL which included most of the teachers involved in the pilot. The first day introduced the background of the Working Community model which is the foundation of the CSLP, as well as its materials and how it can be used. The second day covered the structure and elements of the Working Community program. The role of the

facilitator and the practicalities of assessment and accreditation of learning were also addressed. There was discussion of the relevance and value of the program to the participating schools.

Based on the teachers' and program coordinator's feedback, the following suggestions can be made for future pre-program training.

### *Findings and recommendations*

#### Training should be shorter and take place earlier.

It is vital that all teachers to be involved in the program take part in the training sessions. Given their scant time resources, a shorter training session (one half day) would be more likely to achieve this. It might be helpful to market it to the educational establishments as professional development applicable beyond the delivery of the CSLP.

The training needs to take place earlier in the process (more than two weeks between training and the start of the program in class) to give teachers enough time to familiarise themselves both with the pedagogy and the content of the program and to prepare to implement it.

#### Training needs to cover more content on community sector and community participation

Looking at teachers' dual learning needs, firstly to teach a specific content and secondly to apply a specific method, it seems the teacher training focused primarily on the method while the participants' familiarity with some of the content seems to have been assumed. Teachers need to learn, however, about the context of community participation.

#### Initial training should cover the bigger picture.

Rather than concentrating on the first three phases, the initial teacher training should cover the whole program so that participants are able to grasp the bigger picture. While there would still be room for a training session before phase 4, teachers would feel more confident in assuming their role, if they know from the start what the entire process is about and where they fit in. The teachers' feedback suggests it would be helpful to have 'a very clear structured outline of where you're going, so that from the beginning you know where you're heading'.

#### The training should be more hands-on.

While it is important to understand the underlying theory, the explanation may need to be cut in favour of introducing more practical examples from the pilot. The training session should also adopt a more applied learning format to better suit the teacher as learners.

The presentation of different resources (the student pack and resources for teachers, the DVD) developed during the pilot will contribute greatly to making the program more tangible for teachers, in terms both of the process and the outcome. This should not replace the necessary process of 'learning and understanding through doing', but will help to positively engage teachers from the start.

It is worth noting that the program demands a high level of openness from the teacher, as far as the students' learning process is concerned. While the specific learning outcomes correspond to the VCAL learning outcomes as well as to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS), the learning can take many different forms depending on the students. As noted previously, the focus of the program is on this learning process and ongoing reflection, rather than mere program outputs such as the students' projects and presentations at the end. Given the expected role of the teacher as program facilitators, it is vital to establish their trust in the pedagogy as well as their confidence in applying it. Providing concrete examples and engaging the teachers in role-playing in the different phases during the teacher training may contribute to this.

#### 'Short and sharp' hand outs for each phase may be useful resources for the teachers

Given the novel method and content, it may be helpful to provide short yet comprehensive handouts for each phase to allow the teachers to prepare for each phase without additional research. These handouts may include some theory as well as examples of how the approach has been applied. Teachers are more likely to be reading these than a more theory-heavy reading pack.

## **Facilitator training**

The facilitator training aims to explore with the teachers, youth workers and volunteers the process of effectively supporting and mentoring the students through their projects.

The training took place during one day in a location close to both CAS and NMIT. All participating teachers attended as well as the program staff including some of the volunteers

Teachers were asked to think about issues in their environment and about how these could be addressed, drawing upon resources available in the group. They learned how to facilitate the students' search for a project and project work by sampling the process themselves. The participants had to 'workshop' the following questions: What issues are you passionate about? How could you address them? What would you need to do to organise such a response? Which resources could you draw on?. The workshop facilitator modelled ways of engaging students, identifying the most popular ideas and discussing the planning of projects.

One of the teachers described how he experienced the workshop:

I thought that was really useful because it was almost like a teacher training day, almost like a professional development activity, in the sense of OK, this is another way of presenting material and an alternative way of teaching to the normal 'get up in front of the class and hand out worksheets and discuss and break into groups'. It was more student-led. But even though it was student-led, the teachers still had a fairly important role in ensuring that the students were leading themselves in the right way.

## *Findings and recommendations*

### 'Learning by doing' is most productive.

The teachers' positive feedback from this training suggested it was very helpful and more productive than the initial training session. They appreciated that they could take a model approach away from the day, which they could then apply when running sessions with the students.

### Examples and experiences from the CSLP pilot should be included.

For the next run it may be useful to introduce examples from the pilot, including the barriers that emerged in phase 4.

## **Teacher support by the program coordinator**

The relationship between the participating teachers and the program coordinator is a partnership. As mentioned above, the program coordinator was situated outside the school within the BSL, acting as a contact person and support for the teachers, schools and community partners. Rather than telling the teachers how to do it, the CSLP model suggests that the coordinator supports the teachers in their specific application of the program's pedagogy, respecting the teacher's expertise and the need of different students in different educational settings for different kinds of support by their teachers. Regular exchange on the program implementation between the teachers and the coordinator should ensure that ongoing reflection on the process takes place.

As mentioned above, the CSLP implementation differed significantly between the two participating sites. CAS staff ran the sessions themselves after a few sessions led by the program coordinator, while NMIT staff largely adopted a supportive role while the program coordinator and volunteers were running the sessions.

This difference had to do mainly with the following factors in the respective schools.

On the one hand, at NMIT the YAMEC course followed a model of community programs facilitated by external speakers, such as the Red Cross Leadership Program, which ran parallel to the CSLP. The teacher considered the experience of visiting speakers as very valuable for the students.



I am a great believer that an external facilitator brings in new blood and students often respond better or have a heightened interest in that new person and the ideas which is only natural because it is fresh. ... So I pretty much take a back seat and let them bond with someone new, because that's part of their learning process, dealing with new teachers. They don't like dependency. I treat VCAL as a workplace, I tell them it's a workplace. So in a workplace you have to deal with new people, you have to learn to work with them and you have to do your best because this is what you're being assessed on, your workplace, employment. So for them it is important that they meet new people and that they're weaned off the dependence that they have in class.

On the other hand, CAS staff attached particular importance to the trust they had established with the students, who generally have a history of disrupted schooling and difficult relationships with teachers. They found the combination of self-run sessions, complemented by visits from community organisations or the occasional contact with the program coordinator, to work best and would not have liked more input from the program coordinator.

I think it worked quite well as it was because—being a small school for a certain reason, the trust that we sort of build up with the kids in terms of doing the day to day matters on it, I think it tended to work with just (the co-teacher) and I working as a partnership and saying well, when can we fit the next thing in? I think it has been wonderful having [guest speakers] coming in ... that's done things for the project that we couldn't do ... and the kids seem to respect that they're new people and show them the proper courtesy etcetera. I am not quite sure you'd have to have the coordinator spend a lot of time working with the kids.

At the CAS, two teachers co-facilitated the program. The school structure allowed them to spend more time on program-related tasks and activities where and when needed. Other teachers were able to accommodate changes in their teaching hours if necessary. This was possible because of the small size of the school, its flexible operation and the general support of the CSLP by all staff.

The teacher who was involved in the program at NMIT teaches the Personal Development strand in the YAMEC VCAL and understood his role primarily to be supporting the students' language development and supporting students with their projects between sessions. It was identified in the first third of the pilot that another teacher would also be involved in running the program through the work related Skills Strand due to the intensity of the program in phase 4.

Overall it was found that the necessary resources (i.e. preparation time, classroom management, student welfare needs) to run the sessions independently were lacking at NMIT. The difference between TAFE and school funding has also a whole range of implications for teacher time and how programs are delivered. Due to the overall structure of the program there was little flexibility in shifting timelines, workloads and program components particularly in phase 4.

The teachers in both settings commented on the considerable workload of running the program.

### *Findings and recommendations*

#### The teacher's role needs to be clarified in the planning process.

It is vital that *all* participating teachers understand their facilitator role, including all tasks it involves, as well as their role in relation to the program coordinator's and possible other program workers (e.g. volunteers).

As suggested above, the actual role of each teacher depends on a number of factors including above all availability of resources, student cohorts and scope flexibility within the specific educational setting.

However, for the program to be sustainable, it is necessary to negotiate, plan and budget the different roles and tasks (e.g. organising community visits, facilitating sessions with students) and adhere to the agreed model. While it was possible to compensate for unexpected resource needs in the pilot partly through recruiting volunteers, this strategy may not always be feasible or successful.

It is important to have room for flexibility combined with room for reflection.

Given the program design foresees a final, student-led phase, it is helpful if the educational setting can accommodate some timetable flexibility for the students' engagement in project-related tasks. Especially in planning and preparing for the community projects (phase 4), students may need to engage in research or meetings outside the time allocated for the CSLP.

The pilot showed that such flexibility was easier to achieve at CAS due to the school's size and structure. Depending on the participating school/TAFE, such flexibility may not be achievable, which may impact on the degree to which the process is student-led. However, other factors may influence the role each teacher effectively assumes in the program implementation. These are above all the availability of resources and the characteristics of the student cohorts. Furthermore, the teachers' knowledge of their individual students and their experience with a specific cohort of students (e.g. CALD students) are likely to shape their way of teaching in the program.

To optimise the realisation of the teaching and learning approach of the program within the structure of a specific educational setting and the personalities of the participating teachers, it may be helpful to establish a space for regular exchange and reflection among the participating school/TAFE staff and the program coordinator. This could take the form of regular scheduled meetings for reflection or an online forum where participants could provide feedback and post their concerns.

## **6 The challenge of student engagement**

Most students in the target group experienced multiple difficulties in their daily lives, ranging from housing insecurity to mental health issues and family problems, which were likely to impact on their school attendance and engagement with the activities at school. As mentioned in section 4, issues for young people at NMIT included weak English skills, low literacy, disrupted education, economic disadvantage, family breakdown and fragmentation, housing insecurity, visa insecurity and early pregnancy. For CAS students, issues included history of family violence and breakdown, low literacy levels, prior juvenile offences, a history of poor school engagement, and learning disabilities.

A major task for the CSLP facilitators was to engage students in the program and then to keep them engaged until the completion of the community projects and their presentation. In this environment, the program's focus on a student-led process in designing, planning and implementing projects, in combination with a focus on teamwork, presented particular challenges for the teachers as program facilitators.

One of the teachers reflected on these challenges:

We plan very carefully. So anything that encourages the kids to take something into a particular direction, also anything that encourages them to spend a fair bit of time going out and seeing people and walk around and chatting ... The idea of taking on a project for a couple of terms is a commitment—well what do you do if ...—'cos unless they're going with it, it's dead in the water. So the fact that none of them derailed it and the other week where [a student] said: 'We're taking charge of that section, we show you when the results are out' is another case of 'Okay. There are times where we can comfortably stand back.' And I suppose—yeah, as teachers you learn to recognise when to hold on and when to let go.

### **Student disengagement from education**

The overall challenge of implementing the program with some groups of disadvantaged young people derives from their low level of engagement with activities at school. Identifying a social issue and possible ways of addressing the issue based on their own research is a big task for any student, but even more demanding for students who have difficulties, for example, learning in class, taking notes and planning, and for whom 'other aspects of their lives are often more important than school work or projects' (Teacher).

One of the teachers described the scope of the challenge for his students:

The ability to just feel confident that given a task, you're able to sit and manage the complexity—say organising a phone call or the complexity of going on a computer, look at a whole lot of community organisations, work out what those community organisations are doing and then choose which one interests you and for what reason and a project that's going to (address a problem)—that level of decision making [is just not there] and ... just throwing this on these guys' shoulders without careful steps was probably never gonna happen. ... It's very hard to say: 'This is a project. This is what you're doing. So go run with it!' So the idea of having a student-driven project was quite a challenge. And I suppose we had to make sure the building blocks were in place in order for it to work.

Another related challenge for the teachers as program facilitators was to work with the risk of individual students impacting negatively on their peers' readiness to engage with the program in the class. The teachers' awareness of the power of the group dynamic led them to carefully pick combinations of students for the working in groups.

In a team you're only as strong as your weakest link and if you've got someone who's just not putting in and it's only a small group, so that means they are having a fairly strong negative impact on the group. So I guess we tried to make sure the dynamics were good and we tried to choose the right combinations of kids. That's quite important with groups ... Choosing the right dynamic is very important.

Finally, teachers perceived a tension between the level of control students would have in a strictly student-led approach and those students' level of commitment to their work. This may reflect a perception of many teachers, especially in relation to the student populations this program aims to address, that is students who are little engaged or disengaged from school.

It's almost like they want to take control over it but it's almost a fantasy because they want control but they haven't got work ethic or commitment to finish the project. And that's one of the big issues at school: the difference between the perception of where they're at and the reality of what they have to do. [Teacher]

## **Student attendance and turnover**

Two issues made the implementation of the Community Service Leadership Program at times challenging for the program facilitators as well as the student participants. Firstly, students joined and dropped out throughout the project; secondly, students' attendance fluctuated considerably in both settings.

They might be going really well but then you won't see them for two weeks and then: where are we you up to? So the teachers need to be actively pushing and creating pressure. otherwise the project would not happen. [Teacher]

While these may be common challenges for every teacher, the open-ended, teamwork-based and student-led nature of CSLP is less accommodating to student absences. With students relying a lot more on each other's contribution than in conventional classroom teaching, fluctuating attendance and student drop-out puts considerable pressure on fellow students especially those who take on leadership roles. One of the project groups at YAMEC faced this problem, with one student accomplishing the bulk of the group's work by herself. This needs to be considered in the context of the students' very limited experience with team work in their schooling overseas and their low level of awareness of the impact of their absence on the group's work.

It may be necessary to find ways of addressing the issue of student absences and turnover due to a high likelihood of its emergence with the target group of disadvantaged students. The approach chosen by CAS teachers was to allow for flexibility in team membership and student contributions to the teamwork: this meant no project was entirely dependent on a fixed team and students were able to 'jump in' in the case of absences. Thus the presentation of the gym schedule at the Collingwood Leisure Centre could for example be done by a student who volunteered to replace the unexpectedly absent presenter. This shows that a team spirit and sense of accountability developed also without the strict formation of stable teams.

## Length of the program and student engagement

The teachers in the two sites viewed the relationship between program duration and student engagement quite differently from each other. At YAMEC, the difficulty of keeping students engaged and interested over the entire length of the program was considered quite challenging. The alternative suggestion was to run the program more intensively (e.g. two half days a week) while cutting the overall length. At CAS, the length of the program was viewed as essential for the students to achieve the targeted outcome of implementing a project. This difference may be explained both by differences in the student cohorts and by differences in the general curriculum of these sites. Students at CAS were less independent in engaging with the program activities, thus needing a longer learning process. At NMIT other programs with external facilitators usually run over a shorter time, so students are used to shorter projects.

How much project work can be integrated into the students' schedule beyond the allocated time slot per week depends largely on the institutional setting. It may be desirable to allow the participating educational settings to choose to run the program over a shorter or longer period of time, depending on its integration into the overall curriculum.

Another challenge for the program facilitator is to find a balance between supporting students in 'dreaming big' and assisting them in keeping their work within the range of available possibilities and resources.

(Students) dream big but don't see the steps involved and unless you take them through the process, talk about and work out what the building steps are, they get frustrated. But you'd either have to really scale down their dreams and aspirations and say 'Well you can't have a cubby, you can have a cardboard box, that sort of thing'. And in many ways that's going against what the project's about. Because if it's student-driven then within reason whatever their dream is, should be fully realised. [Teacher]

## Hands-on engagement versus theory and reflection

An important element of the learning model is regular reflection after each step led by the facilitator with the students. An obstacle to this reflective phase, at least in the facilitator's eyes, may be the strong preference for hands-on activities among the students.

I think students sometimes don't understand the concept of why they do things in a secondary school and how this relates to the real world. Especially with our students who prefer hands-on activities, teachers need to get students onto a practical activity quickly. There is not a lot of time in the classroom to be conceptualising and analysing and talking about the theory of why and how. You just don't have the time in the classroom to over-analyse because they become very restless. Our students—I think with their limited concentration span means they prefer to be doing activities rather than too much discussion. [Teacher]

## 7 What are the benefits of CSLP?

The evaluation assessed outcomes against the following list of projected outcomes:

- to have facilitated a number of projects conducted by young people in their communities, as part of their school curriculum
- to have created a sustainable positive relationship between young people and organisations and services in their community
- to have enhanced the meaning for young people of civic and social responsibility and empathy
- to have enhanced the wellbeing of disadvantaged young people by empowering them to identify and implement positive change in their community, thereby proving that they can be instigators of positive change
- To have enhanced young people's employability and communication skills

- To have encouraged a positive attitude in young people towards their future. This may include an increased attachment to education, and to future training and employment pathways as a result of their participation in the program

In addition to those outcomes for young people, outcomes have also been identified for schools and community organisations.

## **Outcomes for young people**

Findings on outcomes of the Community Service Leadership Program have emerged from the four focus groups with students, from interviews with their teachers and from interviews with program staff and representatives of participating community organisations.

### **Enhanced empathy and understanding of civic and social responsibility**

The statements of students themselves as well as of their teachers and community organisations suggest that CSLP contributed to strengthening the students' sense of civic and social responsibility as well as their empathy with others.

Students provided positive feedback on their experience of contributing to other people's lives, based on the pleasure they derived as well as the recognition of benefits this kind of work entailed for themselves:

It makes my day to see other people have a good day.

I think volunteering is good. You can get experience and you can help people who need your help.]

It is interesting to note that both the teachers in one program site and one community organisation representative signalled rather low expectations of the students (see also section on Teachers' experience and learnings). Based on their experience with these students or others in similar circumstances, they expected the participants to react to contact with or information about disadvantaged social groups with disinterest, aggression or contempt. Contrary to those expectations, the students showed indeed interest and empathy:

And in certain situations where they were working with people who have particular needs and particular disadvantages and those things ... I could have predicted in certain circumstances they might either just not want to have anything to do with it at all, respond aggressively, just shut down when they got there or when the person came in. But for most, in fact almost 100 per cent, their participation was quite very positive, their feedback was positive and I think they came away feeling better for the experience and they were actually able to articulate this.

Students were quite responsive, they listened, they weren't sort of ignoring which often happens ... They looked like they were interested ... I was quite impressed that nobody made stupid comments. Nobody made a crack about the disabled. There was no nasty or smart comment. They didn't make fun of anything. To me that showed that they were quite open and perceptive and I don't know whether mainstream school kids would be like that. [Community development worker]

Teachers' low expectations are worth noting also because they may hamper a strengths-based approach to facilitating CSLP. Teachers need to support the students in applying and further developing their capacities, regardless of their preconceptions. This points again to the importance of ensuring space and time for reflection and feedback between teachers and program coordinator.

However, towards the end of the program, all teachers clearly saw progress and change in the students' abilities. As one teacher put it:

[The program] has raised a whole lot of awareness that they didn't have, or they had before but it wasn't put into practice, and they didn't know how they could do things. In some ways

I think there is a huge amount that has been learned from people. Often when you go back and think where they were like before three months ago and look where they are today!

The changes that took place often emerged in a subtle and gradual way. For example, one teacher mentioned how, three months later, the students tended to show much more initiative and make suggestions for suitable action when an issue needed to be solved.

Students themselves observed changes in their knowledge of and engagement with the community. This self-reflection was more pronounced among the YAMEC students who suggested, for example:

I think I learned a lot about issues, some people are passionate about drugs or alcohol and some people are passionate about the environment. Our group is passionate about discrimination. So I knew that everybody has a different issue. So we have to do something about that. I didn't know about that.

If you feel something about the community, you have to tell something and then that will change.

I think this program is good for me because it tells me more about community and how to help the community. Before I was interested in doing something and I didn't know how to find out. And now this program came, I know how to find it out and now I know how to help others.

CSLP also enhanced the meaning of small steps in the bigger picture for the students. Some of the initial ideas for projects were large-scale and needed to be reduced to a feasible format. This was an inherent challenge for the program facilitators who had to find a balance between supporting the students' initiative and big ideas and preventing disappointment from failing to realise that planned big idea. A YAMEC student expressed this learning outcome as follows:

For example, the environment is a big thing you can do something about. But you can do a little bit to learn about it to do something about it. All people come by little by little and then they go up.

## **Empowerment**

An overarching outcome of CSLP is the students' empowerment. Despite the over-use of this notion in much writing on work with disadvantaged groups, it serves as a good descriptor of the sum of different more specific outcomes that will be described in this section.

Significantly, teachers used the term 'empowerment' in different contexts when describing outcomes of the program for the students:

I think [racism] is another issue that bothers them quite a bit and they have been able to articulate that and suggest ways that that can be dealt with or they themselves are learning how to deal with [it based on] their own self-esteem as opposed to running away scared, standing up to someone ... So the fact that they have been able to discuss it has empowered them and made them much more aware that all the others in the class feel that way and that you should say something. That's a huge leap again, that's a huge leap and empowering ... So this kind of process has made them think about it: no, we have a right to express ourselves, talk about civil rights, all of those things.

I think they felt really empowered that they had something that they planned and they were working with kids that needed help with that particular task. They needed even more help than they did because of obviously the language problems, so they felt empowered and the kids at NMIT were quite grateful. So I think they appreciated that in the same way as the Coolibah House people were quite grateful for what they were doing.

The feeling of empowerment in these descriptions derives from different sources. In the first example it is the experience of discussing social issues that need addressing with their peer group and reflecting on possible actions they can take in response. In the second example it is the

students' engagement in activities that allow them to develop and use their skills in a way which is novel and satisfying for them, and that they can see helps others. They recognise their own strengths and abilities in a new way. Furthermore, empowerment also relates to the young people articulating issues they would not normally address and share with others in class, such as the issue of racism or physical or sexual abuse.

It is clear from the teachers' interpretations that they view the student-led nature of CSLP as a vital source of empowerment. The program allowed its young participants, for example, to adopt roles that are different from those they would normally have within their course work. These new roles are more active, independent, responsible and powerful. They allow the students to step out of their role as learners and become active shapers, for example as 'teachers' or 'helpers'. The kind of power this conferred on the students was described by one of the teachers:

The perception that you can make some sort of difference gave them a real avenue to actually go out and find out that there are groups that need help; and that just because some of them might be in a situation where they're disadvantaged themselves in many ways, you know families experience financial disadvantage or a whole range of issues ... but in certain situations they were the ones who are powerful, with the skills, giving the help and were being treated by the other people as such. ... That they had the power—and not power in a bad way, power in the same way that a teacher has power or a nurse, power to make things better or happier or all those sort of things.

The students' description of their interaction with elderly people at the Coolibah directly corresponds to this interpretation:

The day we went to Coolibah House, we sat down with this lady Sue and listened to her whole life story. And just to see her have a smile on her face 'cos somebody is listening to her, I don't know, it just made me feel like I've done something great, I've like made someone happy.

### **Encouragement of a positive attitude in young people towards their future**

One of the desired outcomes with an immediate effect on the post-program transition was the participants' positive attitude towards their future. According to one of the teachers, this was achieved. He suggested the students gained initiative in planning for their future.

I mean there were—with self-confidence developing I think there is a whole range of things happening there. There is movement towards doing things by themselves you could say, There are young students who are now arranging looking at their pathways in a more active way. That active learning that doesn't always take place until people go through the process of leadership and learning about direction. So there is an active learning process in relation to their future, in relation to issues surrounding their own life.

When asked about their plans for the time after the YAMEC VCAL course, almost all focus group participants had at least a career goal or even a plan concerning training and education to achieve their career goal.

### **Increased wellbeing and self-confidence**

CSLP aimed to increase the wellbeing of disadvantaged young people by empowering them to identify and implement positive change in their community, thereby proving that they can be instigators of positive change.

The high level of ownership of the students' work was a crucial cause of student satisfaction in the program. The students clearly benefited from participating in activities which they have instigated and largely designed themselves. One of the teachers reported on the benefit of choice:

Students can choose an activity that they feel like being involved in. I think that's really been good. It allows students to use skills they feel confident about and contribute to the project on some level.

This is a significant outcome especially for students who lack confidence in their skills due to a history of low engagement or disengagement from school.

The students' high level of satisfaction with increased ownership of their work was reflected in their feedback from the activities as reported by one of the teachers:

Generally if you go and do an activity with some of our students and you observe they really got something from it and they've enjoyed the activity and you've completed the activity and at the end you say: 'Did you enjoy the activity?' They'll often say: 'It was all right.' 'It was OK'. And so for them to say the activity has been OK, that means it's been a really successful activity because they never really give teachers a lot of positive feedback. But generally with this program they've been very positive and enjoyed having ownership over the activities chosen in class.

Increased self-confidence also emerged from engaging in volunteer work and thus in a work context where the students learned to reconsider their strengths and weaknesses in relation to others.

Maybe if you feel a little bit unconfident but when you go to volunteer, you can see some people weak like you or weaker than you then you try and say: they're trying, what about me? I can't try this? You give it a go and whatever.

Another source of self-confidence, particularly for the YAMEC students, was related to their enhanced English language proficiency. The program activities demanded their active engagement by speaking out about their interests and contributing their ideas to the group discussion as well as communicating with people outside their course.

When I came first I didn't have confidence by myself. 'Cos I couldn't speak English. So it was really hard for me. I don't even wanted to talk to other people 'cos I was ashamed. But now I know it is not my first language. I have to be confident by myself whatever it is. I can learn. I think I'll be confident by myself. That has really helped me.

Increased wellbeing and self-confidence also emerged from the kind of interactions the students had with members of the community such as the elderly members of the Coolibah or students at the local TAFE, which will be addressed in more detail in the section on social capital. One of the teachers commented on the positive outcomes of students overcoming their initial reservations before this community visit:

Also the range of activities that we've done is quite good and the community involvement and getting out there has been fantastic. The tangible aspect of getting out on the street, going along to the Coolibah House or attending a few different community venues or having guest speakers come into the school and run the activities, the students have enjoyed the involvement. Prior to doing the tasks, the students had reservations or negative views, but we have said: 'Let's give it a go and see how things go'. And once students met people and interacted, they've actually really enjoyed it and realised that it's not that bad.

The students' feedback confirms this analysis:

S1: It was scary but it was good because we probably made their day.

S2: Yeah we communicated.

S3: Like having someone new talk to you.

S2: And listen to your story.

S1: We probably made their day, so that was a good thing.

The service manager described similar outcomes for the students from their interactions with residents:



I think seeing the benefits in the esteem of the younger people is quite significant. To see them do something for the community and be valued. To have that sense of saying actually to do something for somebody else, gives me a good feeling. You know you just don't know what could come of that. You don't know what impact that may have on their decisions down the track.

### **Increased social capital**

Social capital is a concept that describes connections within and between networks of people, but also between individuals. In its popular conception by Robert Putnam (2000), social capital is defined in positive terms as a measure and producer of civic and political engagement. Putnam distinguishes between bonding capital (between socially homogenous groups) and bridging capital (between socially heterogeneous groups), with the latter considered as particularly valuable for society as a whole.

CSLP resulted in an increase in both dimensions of social capital.

Firstly, the students increased their bonding capital through working in teams with their classmates. Prior to the project some had not engaged much with others or had engaged in a negative way (see student quote in section on improved communication skills). Through sharing ideas about the community and ways of effecting change, developing a project idea, sharing the objective of completing a project together, planning and implementing it, the students managed to put personal barriers aside in their contact with each other and engage in collaborative work. A student described these process outcomes:

When the Leadership program came, they put us in groups. So we had to talk. We had to say something about it and this helped me ... my feeling talking to them and well they will understand.

Secondly, through connecting the students with other community members beyond their immediate social environment, the program also achieved an increase in the students' bridging capital. Asked to name positive things they got out of the program, the students named this:

We got to go out there and interact with all different types of people.

We got to know more people.

Through CSLP, the students made contacts they would not normally make as part of their school activities. Nor would these types of contacts have been likely to occur in their private lives outside of school. The people the students met through their community visits and projects were indeed simultaneously strangers to the students' everyday world, yet neighbours in terms of their local community. For example, students at the YAMEC course and at CAS attended their courses only two streets apart and were hence likely to cross paths every day in the street; yet some CAS students have never spoken with any students from CALD backgrounds (and vice versa) before meeting during their project work.

One opportunity arose when two CAS students surveyed thirty students face-to-face at NMIT to explore their leisure interests and preferences for a gym program at the Collingwood Leisure Centre. One of the students described the experience:

We surveyed students from NMIT. It was nice to help them, they asked us questions and it was nice to give them answers.

A teacher reported another student's feedback as conveyed by a guardian:

She came home and said: I had a really good day today, I went to NMIT TAFE and I interacted and had a nice day.

Another meeting took place in the course of the 'Eat First' Anti-Discrimination picnic in Carlton Gardens which YAMEC students had organised as their community project. They hosted students from NMIT as well as CAS students, providing food, music, a quiz and a basketball game.

### **Improved communication skills**

Both teachers and students' accounts suggested that the students improved their communication skills as a consequence of participating in the Community Service Leadership Program. Improvements pertained to various dimensions of communication: English language proficiency, the quality of communication with their peers in class, communication in the work context of the community sector and communication across social borders of age or ethnicity. Much of the practised communication signified a 'first time' for many of the students: for example ringing a community organisation to arrange a visit, striking up a conversation with unrelated elderly people at the Coolibah House, presenting their work in English as their second language in front of the class or even people not related to their school in phase 4 or phase 5.

A student described outcomes on peer-to-peer communication:

We've all learned to communicate with each other now through this project, better than we ever have before. The other girls and us don't really get along but with this project we've actually started getting along and it's making everything easier.

One of the teachers commented on the students' experience of some of this communication:

It's forced a few of them to do things they wouldn't do previously and ... that idea of reaching out, meeting other kids or older people and realising that there's nothing to be afraid of there.

### **Improved teamwork skills**

Students and teachers named teamwork as one of the foremost areas of learning, particularly organisation, trusting each other, confidence and good leadership. When asked to name some of the things they have learned about teamwork in the course of the Community Service Leadership Program, the students suggested the following:

Listening to different ideas, when people think to do something, you have to give your opinion what you think and then come to one idea and then do it.

And trust other people, your classmates. You trust their idea and then you follow them.

You need to listen to other people's ideas, opinions. Sometimes you have to think about why they are talking about this, why are their opinions different from yours. Sometimes maybe you're right, sometimes you're not right.

Teamwork also provided the students with increased bonding capital and was named as one of the most enjoyable parts of CSLP:

I think the best thing is when you work in a group, visiting the community with other people. In class you don't really have much contact but when you work together. That was good.

### **Improved employability**

The above-mentioned skills, especially communication and teamwork, are all contributing to increased employability. An additional example of students gaining work-related skills is their ability to plan, manage and implement a project to a deadline.

Students also recognised the value of volunteering as practice for finding a job, both as a way of gaining familiarity with a specific work context and for gaining confidence:

It's easy to get a job because you have that experience [on] that job ... Because now if you want to get a job, they want to know you have [gathered] experience before. So that's why before you get the job, you want to know everything about the job.

Volunteering can help you to realise more knowledge and learn something about another thing. I think volunteering can make you have some confidence and encouragement.

Asked which skills they picked up that might be useful in a work context, the students named for example teamwork, responsibility, interaction, communication skills:

Whatever you think, what you want to ask, don't be shy and ask, try. And do your best.

Besides, students noted that CSLP forced them to solve a problem, take action and be resourceful in a way they had not needed to do before:

You just kind of get thrown into a situation and have to deal with it and just make do with what you've got. You can't just shy away, you have to do it. And I reckon we've all learned from that.

The teachers also highlighted the fact that students were 'pushing themselves' and overcoming their fears or reservations on different occasions in the program to complete a task, for example when they prepared and conducted a survey in a TAFE.

### **VCAL accreditation**

At NMIT, sixteen students passed both the Personal Development Strand (PDS) and the Work Related Strand (WRS) of their VCAL course through graduating from the program. While their accreditation was based on a combination of attainments, including their participation within the concurrent Red Cross Leadership program, CSLP contributed to their attainments in the modules Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening; Personal Effectiveness; Career Planning; Orientation to Work; Orientation to Learning and Follow Workplace Safety Procedures.

At CAS, five students passed the Personal Development Strand of their course on the basis of their participation in the program. A few others produced some of the work required and should be able to complete next year. Some of them either joined later in the program or had to drop out temporarily due to personal or family issues.

According to the program coordinator, the program was mapped out for students to achieve outcomes for WRS Unit 2 and PDS Unit 1 and 2 for Foundation Level. Some of the students achieved outcomes that would even have satisfied the Intermediate Level.

### **Outcomes for teachers and schools**

Teachers both at CAS and NMIT returned positive feedback and suggested that not only the students but also they have learned through participating in CSLP.

Before turning to these positive outcomes, it is useful to turn to some of the barriers schools may have to overcome before agreeing to participate in the program.

One of the interviewed teachers in the pilot described the following reservations:

Initially I had reservations because we haven't done a lot of community work in the school. We tend to do most things in-house and I was thinking, this may or may not work, not really sure how it's going to go. How are they going to respond and react? Are they going show enough initiative? Will they take it on?

This kind of scepticism also emerged in the initial teacher training session. Teachers expressed doubts whether their students would be able to engage in the program activities in a student-led manner due to factors including low engagement with school, a history of disrupted schooling, limited initiative, weak language proficiency.

Another source of reservation was the fear that teachers might end up 'doing it all':

You always have some form of trepidation because ultimately other projects that we've done, basically end up whoever is involved either spending our time trying to motivate

students or having to complete it ourselves. We've done other projects and they have relied on a lot of teacher input.

While the experience with the pilot did not remove all of these reservations, the interviewed teachers agreed on benefiting from the Community Service Leadership Program.

### **Teachers' experience and learnings**

A major learning for teachers related to their students' capacities, both at school and outside the school environment. The students' performance exceeded their teachers' expectations in terms of their behaviour, their interest in and engagement with the program activities, their independence in executing tasks and their communication skills and attitude in relating to people outside school, such as the clients of the Coolibah, the program partners or even the researchers who conducted the focus groups.

Such positive experiences contributed to the teachers' relationship with their students and in turn to the students' self-confidence and self-identity which had a positive impact on their wellbeing as well as employment readiness. At a more general level, the teachers' positive attitude towards contact with organisations and persons in the community in particular is in effect a crucial precondition for stronger links between schools and communities envisaged in most recent policy commitments (COAG 2008, DEECD 2008). CSLP can hence contribute to ensuring that the benefits of such links will extend also to educational sites with the most disadvantaged young people.

Among the teachers' learnings was also the insight of 'letting go' and giving students space to work independently sometimes:

I thought OK they're going be confused about how to [do something], but they were saying: 'No, we can do this'. And they went off into a room and they're half way through it. And that's great, that's really good. But I would have been a bit like: 'No, do it this way!'—'No!'—'Okay.' So I guess in that sense we also have to know when you let go too.

Finally, the teachers described CSLP as valuable for their students in the range of the skills and challenges it offered through both the method of learning and the program content:

I think this is really a good program for students wanting more hands-on learning. In our experience, not a lot of our students go on to do VCE programs and often they get into a habit of just being in a school and being in a classroom and not necessarily fully engaged and they have the ability to get through the class but the teacher is doing a hell of a lot of work to get them through. This program shifts that back on to students a little bit more. So yeah I think it's a very good way of learning teamwork and leadership and initiative and understanding of how the world works. The reality of making a phone call, writing a letter or doing something. It's more of a real context. It's good.

### **Outcomes at the community level**

The Community Service Leadership Program has the potential of an incentive for community organisations to engage in more outreach work with young disadvantaged people. The pilot shows that there are organisations that seek more contact with young people and appreciate the input of the young participants' project work. A flow-on effect from the work that the young people undertook for the Collingwood Leisure Centre was that they started using the facilities of the Centre themselves, which was perceived positively too.

### **Improved perception of young people**

The observations of the interviewed community stakeholders also show that the perception of young people can change for the better through such a program:

They were a pretty tough bunch of kids to engage. ...But when they showed the presentation, I just thought: Wow, that's was amazing! And the information that they got

was quite helpful for us, for me trying to work out what young people want. So it actually achieved something and there were some things that I actually learned, compared to the way that we ask questions. ...I thought that's fantastic. Did the teachers do them? And they said: 'No, between them all the kids did them'. And I thought that was really professional and a project well done. [Community development worker]

I think through programs like this and similar programs older people then feel more comfortable. Because again they don't see a group of young people, they just see 'someone that reminds me of YZ who is a nice guy actually. He came in wearing a hat and baggy pants, but he is a nice kid'. [Community service manager]

A range of positive feelings developed in the course of the interaction between the students and members of the community including mutual respect. Some community members were reported to even have developed pride in the students' work.

### **Improved school–community links**

There is evidence that the Community Service Leadership Program has contributed to schools and community sector organisations forging links by providing a positive experience of the exchange between the students and people external to the school environment. Such links are important aims on the current policy agenda (COAG 2008, DEECD 2008).

Through the CSLP, the BSL Coolibah Centre has for example extended their existing links with schools to more disadvantaged students. The CAS students' interaction with the Coolibah members was different from that observed with more privileged students in that the CAS students seemed to be more focused on looking for some common ground.

And that was important for the members as well, to be able to talk about that and to be listened to. And so I think the younger people, the students, could see that. They could see the members really appreciated the questions and the respect, which then meant the students seemed to engage them more and be even more respectful and appreciative. Lovely to see that kind of energy between the two. [Community service manager]

One of the schools has already discussed possibilities for future engagement of students in one of the community services.

## **8 Recommendations**

Throughout the report, several suggestions have been made for making the CSLP more sustainable and effective in achieving outcomes. This section brings together these recommendations:

- **Teacher training**

Both training modules for teachers/facilitators should take place at an earlier stage in the program to ensure teachers can adequately prepare for the task. Both modules should be very hands-on and contain examples from the CSLP Pilot, both in terms of the projects but also the processes involved in facilitating the program. It may be useful to practise the activities involved in the different phases with the teachers. The content of the training may need to be expanded to cover the concept of community participation and the community sector.

- **Student pack and teacher resource**

It may be useful to further adapt the pilot resources for students and teachers of students of non English-speaking backgrounds to minimise their work in translating the content into simpler English. The student pack in particular needs simpler language to make it more useful for NESB students, possibly together with more pictorial material. Given the complexity of the tasks, it is vital that the supporting resources are easy to use for the students. Adding a glossary with definitions of key terms (e.g. citizenship, community, empowerment) may be useful too.

All teachers may benefit from 'short and sharp' handouts for each phase that compress the aims and suggested methodology/pedagogy.

- Relationship of teachers and program coordinator

The exact scope of the roles of the teacher and the coordinator in the program implementation (i.e. the tasks of running sessions and facilitating community project work) need to be negotiated/discussed directly with *all teachers* who participate, prior to the start of the program. It may be useful for this discussion to take place well in advance so that its outcomes can be translated in adequate resource allocation, including the resourcing of volunteers as project facilitators if necessary.

- Exchange between schools

It may be useful to schedule regular meetings between the schools at the start to encourage exchange of experience and mutual learning as well as plan meetings of all participating students if desired.

- Engagement with community organisations

The program should focus on those organisations that have educational officers and possibly also opportunity for hands-on engagement for the students, to maximise outcomes of the contact for students. Organisations should be contacted prior to the start of the program and scope for student projects discussed. While this should not preclude student initiatives, it will make the contact more productive for the students and the organisations.

- Induction event for students

It is important that the induction event includes several hands-on, practical exercises such as the Drumming Workshop. The theoretical part of the induction event should include examples of community projects from the Pilot, if possible presented by the student organisers. It is vital that all formal speeches are informed by the strengths-based approach that recognises the strong capabilities and assets of young people. If the approach is not understood, there is the risk that the message will be disempowering.

- Additional funding or in kind support

Based on the resources required for the pilot, the program coordinator may need to be costed higher than at 0.4 EFT. The exact staffing requirement will essentially depend on the distribution of tasks negotiated with the participating school/TAFE prior to the program start. Experience from the pilot suggests that:

Case A. In a setting where external program facilitators deliver the program, the class teacher may not be willing to run the program on a weekly basis without external support for a variety of reasons (class size, cohort needs, resources). If this is the case, project facilitators need to be recruited and funded, unless they are engaged as volunteers as was the case in the pilot, where five volunteers<sup>7</sup> contributed in sum approximately 43 days of work in addition to the 0.8 position the coordinator actually fulfilled (while budgeted as an 0.4 position).

Case B. If the educational staff are committed to running the weekly sessions and requires external support only for specific purposes such as the facilitator training, the provision of community organisation contacts etc., the program coordinator position may only need to be 0.5 EFT.

Student numbers are another influential factor in this context as teaching staff needs to be available for the role of facilitating the project work. In practice this means, each student project requires one staff as facilitator in phase 4.

- Leadership opportunities for program graduates

To sustain the program outcomes for its participants, it seems vital that they are provided with further opportunities. This could take the form of mentoring or linking in with community-based work experiences or mentors.

- Additional funding for the evaluation

It would increase the weight of the program evaluation if longitudinal methods were included such as the follow-up interviews with the students after several months and longer. Furthermore, it

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<sup>7</sup> Including a community worker, a graduate student and a registered teacher.

would be valuable to gather information on teachers' initial expectations of pedagogies that involve working with the community and their impact. This is particularly relevant given that links between schools and communities are high on the state and federal policy agenda.

## 9 Conclusion

The evaluation reveals that the program led to positive outcomes for most students and also for the participant program sites, the schools and the community sector organisations. The interviewed student participants and teachers, as well as the stakeholders from the community sector, agreed that the program generated valuable outcomes. There was also agreement that some relevant outcomes of the program may only emerge in the future, but that some small changes now can be read as indications of a beginning of gradual, long-term change.

In summary, CSLP produced outcomes for individual students and for the community level. At the individual level, students benefited from empowerment and gains in confidence, skills, wellbeing, social capital and civic and social responsibility. At the community level, the increased interaction between students and the community led to increases in the students' awareness of social issues and of opportunities to address those, as well as in other community members' awareness of students' voices and capabilities, and thereby to stronger relationships between different community members and a stronger sense of civic responsibility. Also at the community level, links between schools and different agencies in the community benefited both parties in opening up opportunities for mutual learning, exchange and partnerships.

### **Key elements promoting students' empowerment, social capital, skills and wellbeing**

Firstly, the preparation and carrying out of community visits took students away from the comfort zone of their school or TAFE and engaged them in practising their social interaction and communication skills with different community members. There is evidence that the experience of these interactions increased the students' self-esteem and feeling of empowerment. Furthermore the contact with community sector workers increased the students' social bridging capital.

Secondly, the skills workshops provided the students with a valuable opportunity to learn about self-confidence and trust, leadership and team work. They were successful in fostering the students' teamwork skills and their understanding of leadership skills. Many of the students engaged in teamwork for the first time in this program and thus learned about its potential and challenges. Most students and the teachers described the workshops in very positive terms including their outcomes for the following phase of project work.

Thirdly, the core element of CSLP, the students' work on a community project as a response to a social issue that the students themselves identified, provided them with a range of opportunities for youth-led activities, from the planning to the organisation and implementation of a group work to a deadline. While this phase clearly helped the students to improve their employability, it also improved their understanding of the community, community structures and scope for actively contributing to change. As such it worked as applied learning about community participation, its parameters and rationale. The opportunity to shape an intervention together with their peers empowered the students by drawing on their strengths to connect with very productively with the community. For many students, the community project phase opened up new sites, strategies and understandings of civic engagement.

### **Key elements promoting social inclusion at the community level**

Firstly, the community visits contributed to fostering links between educational sites with disadvantaged young people and community sector organisations. Stronger links between schools and communities are a key objective on recent policy agendas (COAG 2008, DEECD 2008). The rationale of CSLP was effectively to ensure such links also incorporate those student populations that may be considered 'too risky' to be taken out of school, due to their behaviour or 'otherness'.

In the short term, these links provided good opportunities for mutual learning. Young people learned about social issues and how they are being addressed in the community; community workers learned about the questions, issues and attitudes of young people. In the medium and long term, these links may be strengthened and turned into longer term engagement of young people in the community sector. The selection of community organisations as partners in the program has a vital influence on the students' learning about community engagement—from helping to shaping—that is starting here.

Secondly, the outcomes of the skills workshop—increased teamwork skills, leadership and self-confidence—are crucial preconditions of civic and social engagement. Beyond the employability which these skills promote, they also increased the participants' capability to take action together with others and based on an understanding of other people's viewpoints and approaches.

Thirdly, the student-led phase of working on the community projects honed the teacher's practice and expertise in a strength-based approach of working with students. This approach provided students who are often considered 'needy' by the people working with them, with the opportunity to draw on their own and their peers' strengths to learn and achieve an outcome for the community.

The five projects which the participants achieved each in their own way generated positive outcomes for community members beyond their peer group.

The workshop on environmentally aware living raised awareness of strategies that reduce environmental damage; the workshop on sexual health and self-defence provided women of CALD backgrounds with valuable health information and strategies to increase their wellbeing; the multicultural picnic generated bonding and bridging capital among young people of different cultural and social backgrounds and raised awareness of a social problem (racism); the exhibition of students artwork at the Coolibah and its preparation contributed to breaking down barriers with the involved groups of young and elderly people by changing the perception of each other's place in society; and the research and presentation of a gym schedule for young people provided the community leisure facility with valuable input for an engagement strategy. All of these constitute successful examples of community engagement, initiated, organised and implemented by disadvantaged young people.

In sum, the CSLP pilot achieved its aims and has the potential to be further developed into an effective strategy to improve disadvantaged young people's capabilities and their community participation as well as teachers' support of those young people as community participants and the connections between schools and communities.



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