

# ***Village of Learning***

Research Report

***Students not in secondary school and not employed,  
engaged in alternative independent school programs  
within a Community College***



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## Executive Summary

This study into an alternative secondary education learning model for Independent Schools Victoria (ISVic), was conducted by Rodney Wangman, Principal, of the Albury Wodonga Community College (AWCC).

The research is unique in that it is informed by the participants in the community school organisation. It analyses the students' reasons for their reconnection to formal education, and highlights the diverse and important wellbeing outcomes.

This report explores the benefits offered to and achieved by disengaged youth 'at educational risk' in years 9 to 12, through their participation in two registered independent schools embedded in an Adult and Community Educational facility.

Data gathered from interviews and surveys at two schools in Wodonga, Victoria and Albury, New South Wales are analysed. Participant interviews explore:

- the role of adult and community education, in senior Secondary School education;
- the notion of a community *Village of Learning* and the drawing power of such a facility to attract young people, aged 15 to 19 years, who had been disengaged from education;
- the safety, responsiveness and holistic approach of the learning alternatives provided; and
- the educational renewal for students, and the academic, social and employment outcomes achieved.

The research analyses quantitative survey data related to students' learning and wellbeing for the following student cohorts:

2010:	189
2011:	211
2012:	193

The research also uses qualitative data analysed through constant comparative methods with themes developed from interviews, considering the learning and wellbeing outcomes students experienced. It does this by reviewing student narratives about their learning and participation in the two independent community schools. Research methods included focus groups, surveys of community sentinels, student interviews and case studies.

During the research period, a pilot 'out of school' impact program (*2cool4school*) was introduced, as a result of student feedback. This program was designed to offer an even more alternative approach than that provided to the 2006 to 2012 'in school' student cohort. This 'out of school' approach produced even greater impact for students and their families, communities and work. This type of program is flagged for further research.

Evidence is provided of the acute need for responsive secondary education alternatives in community settings that adopt adult learning principles as a positive option to re-engage young people in years 9 to 12 who are at educational and long-term unemployment risk.

The findings indicate that enhanced health and wellbeing support mechanisms are necessary for students 'at risk', which may later prevent the need for social, behavioural and/or clinical intervention in their lives.

It is recognised that not all students succeed in the present institutionalised education system, and that there is an untapped capacity within community training organisations to provide more varied learning alternatives for senior secondary age students at educational risk.

The research identifies the need to address many of the recognised 'determinants of disadvantage for young people at educational risk' particularly social exclusion, unemployment, substance abuse and inadequate nutrition. (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2007.)

The research reviews the need for Foundation Skills training, with greater emphasis on language, literacy and numeracy that increases a student's employability skills within a national context of structural workplace adjustment.

The research finds that non-academic employability skills such as personal presentation, teamwork and a sense of humour, have greater merit than currently credited, particularly when students look to achieve workplace entry and participation.

The research confirms the important role that community organisations can play in providing contexts of lifelong/lifewide learning and their capacity to enhance a young person's educational wellbeing. Potential exists for a wide range of community-based organisations in Australia to offer alternative pathways for senior secondary students at educational risk, to achieve higher educational outcomes and, consequentially, improved employment opportunity.

The research demonstrates, in terms of accredited outcomes, that greater achievement can be made with students considered 'lost' from education. Connection with employment is also more favourable for students.

There is also scope to offer an elite one year, post graduate course for Senior Secondary School teachers, to better apply adult education principles and alternative vocational settings, within their institutional school systems.

Published research (2012) by Kitty te Riele of the Dusseldorp Skills Forum broadens the evidence of national need and further supports the efforts made so far by the Albury Wodonga Community College.

The work undertaken to date by the Albury Wodonga Community College, has produced measurable success at creating two Independent Schools, in two states of Australia, under different education authorities and then, more recently, an 'out of school' alternative.

Going forward into and beyond 2013, the refinement of the alternative Albury Wodonga Community College 'in school' offerings will continue to develop, by expanding the 'out of school' programs of *2cool4school*, *A Fair Go* and *Lifeworks*. The initial appeal and response from students to these 'out of school' programs is so encouraging that expectations have already been recast to a larger number of students for 2013, with an increased level of expectation of higher educational outcomes than could ever have been originally anticipated.

There is scope to expand research into other programs of this nature in conjunction with other world-leading school/education organisations such as the Youth Forest School for Scotland, Children's University of Hull UK, *Learning Cities* Projects in Northern America and Canada, and the University of *Te Wananga o Aotearoa* New Zealand, offer leading comparisons and validation opportunities that cultivate innovative responses to the needs of disengaged secondary education learners in a paradigm of holistic education of the future.

The Albury Wodonga Community College will seek to further the good work undertaken so far, mindful of not creating successful models in isolation to all other educational providers or systems, but to take the student appeal created so far into a national delivery model, given that disengaged secondary education students in Australia constitute an approximately 15% of the school population.

We aim for the success of all, rather than just the majority.

## Findings and Recommendations

Students who undertake the Albury Wodonga Community College 'alternative school' programs are typically much less likely to enrol in other forms of learning, in part by virtue of home and family commitments/issues, and also because their previous attempts at learning in school, have often been relatively unproductive.

However, the Albury Wodonga Community College has developed a range of broader school alternatives with wider *non*-vocational benefits, with more than 70% of students positively succeeding in re-engaging in school, and 88% of these students indicating that they will positively seek to continue into either further higher education or work.

The Albury Wodonga Community College's success comes essentially from its novel and highly integrated design elements of school and vocational training inside an adult learning/support environment. Recently, the new 'out of school' *2cool4school* program has witnessed extraordinary success due to an individual student focus, home-centred delivery, fee-free status, carefully chosen resources that touch on most aspects of life, and attractive media and materials, as well as support that includes a coach. The positive 'pulling power' of the alternative schools and *2cool4school* programs to prospective teenage learners out of institutional secondary education is not in doubt. The *2cool4school*'s fresh approach revolves around its deliberate emphasis on what the learner already knows and can achieve – based on learning at home/work with the support of a coach. This is in stark contrast to most Secondary School and Vocational Education and Training (VET) alternatives that tend to focus on assessment, and presuppose learner deficit.

The rates of formal school completion, satisfaction with the accredited courses, and some immediate transitions to paid work validate the likely timeliness and appropriateness of the alternative adult education-centred 'in school' and 'out of school' resources, in Australia.

There is evidence from this evaluation of the capacity of the Albury Wodonga Community College alternative secondary education programs to reach homebound and socially excluded teenagers and adults who might not otherwise access Secondary School, adult, or vocational education.

The researched student group includes a disproportionate number of teenagers and adults with 'a lack of skills, no work, low self esteem and expectations, lifestyles in fragmented communities, poor housing, crime, ill-health and drug related dependencies. Expecting such students to immediately progress in large numbers into work or further education, after engaging with the Albury Wodonga Community College is very optimistic, though many clearly do. There is nevertheless evidence from this research that these types of alternative programs provided by the Albury Wodonga Community College have transformed the lives of many individuals in their secondary education senior levels and, in doing so, helped to redress persistent intergenerational and socioeconomic disadvantage, and enhance community wellbeing, including health and happiness.

Although there is significant potential in Australia for 'out of school' programs like *2cool4school* to complement Job Network programs, it is suggested that educational alternatives such as this include still new and better ways of bringing learners together and incorporate more 'hands on' activity to engage kinaesthetic learners.

The recommendations below point to possible opportunities for strategic improvement of the alternative school thinking, to best take account of the increasing need in Australia to find new ways of making learning attractive and enjoyable, for young educationally disengaged youth.

- Given the continuing dropout rate of secondary education students and against national objectives for higher rates of school retention, the opportunities offered through adult education and community providers should be established. As there is not always easy access to local adult and community education providers in Australia, collaborators should be sought in locations where ACE (Adult and Community Education) providers do not exist and/or have strong community support. The purpose would be to identify and supply coaches to reach prospective students in and through community-based voluntary organisations, as appropriate to the local and Australian cultural context.
- Programs like that at the Albury Wodonga Community College must incorporate a planned, systematic and independent method of ongoing research and evaluation, quantitatively and qualitatively recording and measuring the diverse impacts and outcomes, against program goals and objectives. The data should include information from and about student experiences and outcomes pre-course, during and post-course, complemented by routine program evaluation via teachers and coaches.
- In close liaison with school education peak organisations or through specialist teacher education programs, certain components of the Albury Wodonga Community College alternative education programs should be customised to meet the specific needs of the significant numbers of current students leaving secondary education in Australia.
- To attract kinaesthetic learners, with previous negative experiences of formal learning and literacies more 'hands on', problem-based and practical activities where students actively make, create, speak and do things, rather than respond primarily in written words, should be developed in alternative school programs.
- The growth and proliferation of the current *2cool4school* pilot should be controlled in a sustainable way to monitor and ensure quality and to respond to the evaluation and outcome data of this particularly special student cohort.
- The timely services provided by the *2cool4school* coaches and the selection, training and evaluation systems applying to coaches should be recognised as a key factor mediating student satisfaction and success in the program. Wherever feasible, some coaching and learning should take place collaboratively, in small student groups and face-to-face, with linkages back into learning centre organisations.
- Finally, collaboration between the Albury Wodonga Community College and other leading international secondary disadvantaged education and youth focussed organisations, should continue as an incubator of new ideas and longitudinal research validation in this ever-changing learning environment.

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*Student excursion to Canberra, July 2006*

## CONTENTS

<i>Executive Summary</i> .....	2
<i>Findings and Recommendations</i> .....	4
<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	6
<i>Abstract</i> .....	9
<b>Part 1: Introduction</b> .....	10
Research Questions and Rationale .....	11
Context for the Research.....	12
Limitations of this Research .....	14
Context of the National School Position .....	15
<b>Part 2: The Albury Wodonga Community College</b> .....	17
Background of the College .....	17
The <i>Village of Learning</i> .....	17
The Community College Network .....	17
Adult and Community Education Organisations .....	17
<i>Eat Well, Do Well</i> .....	18
Pre Independent Schools .....	20
<i>Youth Pathways</i> - A Snapshot.....	20
<b>Part 3: Creation of the Wodonga and Albury Schools</b> .....	24
Wodonga School 2006 to 2009 .....	24
Years 2006 to 2009 .....	25
2008 Independent Schools Victoria - Survey Results .....	26
Our Students 2006 to 2009.....	27
Student Achievements .....	28
Albury School .....	29
Two Systems of Education.....	29
Years 2010 to 2012 .....	31
<b>Part 4: Methodology/Results/Analysis</b> .....	32
<i>My School</i> .....	32
Student Demographic .....	32
Student Analysis: Knowing our Students, 2010 to 2012 non-academic data .....	34
Quantitative Research .....	37
Qualitative Research.....	37
Reflection on the Links between Learning and Wellbeing.....	38
Motivating Factors that Re-engage Learning.....	38
Analysis.....	38
<i>2Cool4School</i> (August – November 2012) .....	43

<b>Part 5: Research Methods, Data Capture, Literature Review .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Research Sampling Methodology .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Appendix 1   References .....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Appendix 2   Bibliography.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Appendix 3   Survey Instrument.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Appendix 4   Annotated Bibliography.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Appendix 5   Associated Programs and Research .....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Appendix 6   Community Sentinel Responses .....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Appendix 7   Glossary.....</b>	<b>70</b>

## Abstract

This research study is an exploration of an alternative secondary education learning model, which occurs through participation in education provided in a community setting in Albury Wodonga. Key data gathered for this research have been collected from students in years 9 to 12 at two Albury Wodonga schools from 2006 to 2012.

In this research project, 'educationally at risk' is defined as 'students who are likely to realise low scholastic achievement and drop out of senior secondary education, consequently finding it difficult to achieve and maintain employment or undertake further education'.

The research finds that many students come to the AWCC as a result of bullying, pregnancy, inflexibility of school timetables, sexual orientation, mainstream drop out, some alcohol and/or drug influence, peer pressure, negative friends and family or home circumstances.

The data collected includes student profiles, student educational achievements prior and post attendance at the Albury Wodonga Community College, educational and employment aspirations, academic change, length of stay at the AWCC and indirect non-educational related impacts. These data were collected from a total of some 600 students. In addition, more than 10 community representatives were interviewed and contributed their impressions and views on the level of success achieved by the Wodonga and Albury alternative independent schools.

This report will continue to be expanded in coming years with the data from interviews and student survey results from future student cohorts. This learning and welfare-related research is unique, not only as is it informed by students, but also by 'community sentinels', representatives of a range of business and community-based organisations. It attempts to analyse learning as a wellbeing phenomenon in terms of the outcomes reported by the students.

The evidence shows that adult and community education centres, because of their adult learning based on participation in and the running of like activities found within all community organisations, can offer to students at educational risk, greater holistic educational opportunities than institutionalised based schools. Further, evidence emerges that there is an acute need for the education system to be adaptive to adult learning strategies which can better engage senior year students, with consideration for greater inclusion and wellbeing. We suggest the need for wellbeing advocacy to recognise the students' need for social, behavioural and/or clinical intervention in their lives which, in some instances, may be a significant first step.

Widespread involvement of the community, through adult and community education centres, has the advantage of preventing the standardisation of students and results in students developing recovery/coping strategies to overcome their skills deficits.

We celebrate that all students, including those at educational risk, can gain an education through non-traditional school learning which can lead to the achievement of employment, further education and community benefits.

On the basis of this research, it may be concluded that alternative education models such as that in community-based organisations, can provide a critical last option for senior secondary education students to achieve far better than their previous educational achievements.



Rodney Wangman  
School Principal and research project leader.

## Part 1: Introduction

This is the first Australian case study of senior secondary school-aged students, who have disengaged from education and then returned into a community-based adult and community education setting. Most existing educational research is focused on government and religious Secondary Schools, while this research investigates and compares the sentiments of students disengaged from the secondary education system who decide to re-engage with schooling through an alternative educational model. It covers their attitudes and experiences of learning and, in particular, what is referred to as 'non-formal' learning.

These students are considered 'educationally at risk' - 'students who are likely to realise low scholastic achievement and drop out of senior secondary education, consequently finding it difficult to achieve and maintain employment or undertake further education'.

Often educational research is based around secondary education students learning formally in secondary educational programs and being assessed, ultimately in order to gain work or a work-related qualification. This research is different. It reviews progress over a six-year period of students at two sites, one in Albury in New South Wales (NSW) and one in Wodonga in Victoria, among students aged 15 to 22 years with average Socio Economic Status (SES) scores of 85 and 87 respectively. The purpose of the research is to analyse the benefits of the students' re-engagement in alternative learning and to see how the wellbeing of the students were impacted, over the period. The aim was to find out what was attractive and different about the alternative adult-based educational settings that worked for these disengaged students, the benefits the students perceived compared with other, institutionalized, school settings, and to identify better ways to keep students in current mainstream secondary education.

The study sought to gain knowledge of how to improve the attractiveness and effectiveness of the existing school-based Vocational Education and Training (VET) system and how, if possible, the principles of adult education, learning styles of students and successful practised workplace learning programs, could be applied in the institutional classroom.

This research into students' learning, through participation in education associated with community organisations, is timely in the context of:

- the poor completion rates of students in senior years of secondary education;
- concerns about the wellbeing of the increasing numbers of young people not involved in the paid workforce;
- the differences community involvement can make to a young person's learning and wellbeing; and
- skepticism about the value of informal, lower level training, for re-engaging 'displaced' students with school.



*Certificate presentation to graduating students, Wodonga 2010*

## Research Questions and Rationale

### Research Questions

The research questions were:

- 1 What shapes attitudes and participation towards learning of senior secondary students with relatively socially disadvantaged backgrounds, not in school and not in paid work?
- 2 Which settings engage inactive students with a limited achievement in secondary education, for what reasons and with what outcomes?
- 3 What learning roles do adult and community education providers/students play?
- 4 What can be done to re-engage secondary education students in learning, through adult and community education?

### Rationale

The research premise was that students 'not in school' can pose problems for themselves, their families and the community.

A mixed research method was used to investigate students' attitudes and participation towards learning, in the Albury Wodonga Community College where students were known to be relatively socially disadvantaged. The research relied on interviews and surveys exploring the learning and wellbeing related experiences of students as participants in the two community-based schools.

The insights and findings about why some students do not enjoy learning in institutionalised school settings has potential benefit to School and Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers, including private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) that target such disengaged young people; this includes identification of learning strategies that are positive and therapeutic for disengaged students.



*AWCC student (winner of \$1000 scholarship), with her mother, Wodonga 2010*

## Context for the Research

*“If learning isn’t fun, why would you want to learn?”*

Rodney Wangman, Principal, 2007 Student Graduation Wodonga Community College

Our experiences indicate the link between ENJOYMENT at school and a raft of positive individual life outcomes that include work, health and family, and it goes beyond that, into societal and community benefits. It is not just what is LEARNT at school per se that makes the difference, it is having the self-confidence and ability to KEEP learning, as well as knowing HOW to learn that makes the difference. Both the personal internal urges to KEEP learning and knowing HOW to learn are invariably diminished for people whose experiences (memories) of school are negative.

So what does it say to us when over 40% of the Australian population, have undertaken no other forms of education since they left school? (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. 2005.)

The Albury Wodonga Community College recognised that perhaps the current form of mass secondary education is not for everyone, and that to reconnect over 40% of the population back into learning, post-school, would take something special. There is little argument that almost all these people can be reconnected to learning and then apply that learning. Greater success in this respect is paramount for the future workforce needs of Australia.

The Albury Wodonga Community College is a ‘community response’ school which is not constrained by the historic silo thinking of secondary education. It was born from the constrictions of fluctuating State Government specific and ad hoc funding to help young people who were considered to be ‘at educational risk’.

In 2005 the Wodonga community alone had, and continues to have, 250 to 300 young people aged 15 to 19 years who are unemployed and not in secondary or any other form of education (North East Local Learning and Employment Network (NELLEN). 2005).

The Albury Wodonga Community College’s first independent non-government school (funded recurrently by the Commonwealth Government) was the first of its kind encased within an Adult and Community Education framework in Victoria. The 2004 decision to create the school was a direct response to the community voice that our Board of Directors heard, via their broad and diverse links into the community fabric of Albury Wodonga.

To establish the school, it felt very much like we had to break a set of often sacred and unspoken philosophical educational rules. Suffice to say, we won, through developing new ideas and creative responses for one small part of our society which has long-term and endemic resistance to education. The first proof of that came in our own first term survey response from our new school students in 2006, in which 88% indicated that they only returned to school because they heard we ‘were offering something different’.

We hoped to have 25 year 11 and year 12 students arrive at our door on the 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2006, at our campus in the Wodonga Central Business District, with our specific target being senior secondary students who were not in school and who were unemployed. In fact, we enrolled 36 students at our new Albury Wodonga Community College.

Of those 36 original students:

- 27 completed the first year
- 3 relocated to other areas
- 2 gained employment during 2006 and left the program
- 4 joined other educational programs in adult education or TAFE (Technical and Further Education) during 2006.

Other students enrolled to backfill these original places, but by the end of that 2006 we still had 31 registered students.

The geographical spread of the students was:

- Wodonga – 21
- Albury - 7
- Beechworth - 1
- Chiltern - 1
- Corowa - 1



*Students and teachers in the early years of our small school, Wodonga 2009.*

At commencement, advice from local secondary school representatives were that, we would only need to meet the needs of between 30 and 50 students per annum. It is interesting that the number of students enrolling has since grown quickly and over a relatively short period of time.

So what makes this School different? Simply, we place our students inside a *Village of Learning*, our adult education centre, among at least 200 adult students a day undertaking accredited and non-accredited training, and some 50 to 75 adult employed staff. This is a reversal of the ratio of traditional Secondary School communities where adults are in the minority and behaviours and expectations are different. To have 16 to 18 year olds mixing with adults ranging in age from 20 to over 90 changes the learning environment and, correspondingly, the younger students' attitudes and efforts. The older students create an atmosphere of calmness, wisdom and patience for the students who are largely from difficult family situations; incidental learning assistance that can be described as 'putting older heads on young shoulders' occurs.

In Victoria, our students follow the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) model, which places a heavy emphasis on vocational education and training. For our students it includes Certificates I, II and III and some Certificate IV outcomes in Retail, Hospitality, Multimedia, Business Studies, Children's Services, Animal Studies, Disability Services, Building Studies, Beauty Therapy and several other similar qualifications.

Each year, our students willingly participate in community events such as *Clean up Australia Day*, *Anzac Day*; the Upper Hume Community Health Service *Celebration Day*; Wodonga City Council's *Lets Read Program*, *Carnivale* and *Children's Fair* and Health Week *Breakfast with Creative Learners*.

The Albury Wodonga Community College has been successful in a short period of time, winning back students previously unlikely to re-engage in education, offering a low cost or fee-free approach and supporting students in a mix of program alternatives. The demand from this previously disengaged cohort has been surprising and student willingness to learn has been reflected in strong, consistent attendance.

Our model, the 'community response school' can only work with small groups mixed with high levels of adult association. It appears that the students are voting with their feet.

The Albury Wodonga Community College started out as two of the smallest Secondary Schools in Victoria and New South Wales, but our success indicates that we have overcome intergenerational issues exacerbated by state-sanctioned and built-in cultural, pedagogical, funding and fee biases of hierarchies between higher education, Vocational Education and Training (VET) and even Adult Community and Education (ACE).

We are closely guarding our Schools to prevent them from becoming 'fishbowls' of interest to pedagogues. However, it is clear that different responses to education are needed to break the cycle for our nation of undereducated and unemployed young people with diminished ability to contribute to the social and community capital of our nation. The Albury Wodonga Community College Independent Schools are just one component of the educational alternatives we are developing to respond to the different needs of our communities.

This research document provides the following:

- 1 aspects of our history;
- 2 a review of internal student data, and importantly, the non-direct and non-traditional student data, rather than just academic scores;
- 3 the community perceptions of our achievements; and
- 4 information on a successful 'out of school' pilot program (*2cool4school*) complementing the two alternative Schools.

This is a dynamic document; it will be regularly updated to further review, improve and direct what we see as the ever-changing education issues for young people disengaged from education and/or employment.

### **Limitations of this Research**

This research commenced in late 2011. The researcher acknowledges the limitations of retrospectively gathering information over a previous ten year period, as the information and data gathered in more recent years are more detailed.

As a notion, the *Village of Learning* has changed across the years 2006 to 2012; consequentially the mix of learner demographics and facility conditions, and the availability government programs and company focus have ebbed and flowed. So, while an exact baseline of these factors is not purposefully described or measured, what is evident is that the *Village of Learning* has remained as a mixture of childcare facilities (0-5 year olds), youth (12-19 year olds), adults (20-55 year olds), seniors (55-90 year olds), in ratios of 70:30 women to men and 50:50 accredited and non-accredited training across the decade.

The 'learning' without longitudinal research evidence has evolved into higher educational qualifications, but learning pathway programs/courses have remained, leading from non-accredited courses to Certificate I and up to Graduate Certificate and Diploma levels.

The teaching styles have been influenced by the Albury Wodonga Community College's history since 1974 first as an ACE provider and then as a key instigator of *Learning Cities* initiatives, with Wodonga being declared Australia's first *Learning City*, in 2000.

## Context of the National School Position

The *Australian Bureau of Statistics Schools 2010* report (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011) states:

Over the past 10 years the number of schools in Australia has decreased by 132, from 9,600 in 2000 to 9,468 in 2010. In that time, the number of government schools fell by 223, including a decrease of 59 schools from 2009 to 2010. Over that same decade, the number of non-government schools increased by 91, with most of that growth occurring before 2005.

In 2010, across Australia, there were 6,743 government schools (71%), 1,708 Catholic schools (18%), and 1,017 Independent schools (11%).

It states further:

In 2010, there were 3,510,875 students in Australian schools, the distribution of these students throughout the states and territories was:

- 32% in New South Wales
- 24% in Victoria
- 21% in Queensland
- 10% in Western Australia
- 7% in South Australia and
- 5% between Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory.

Interestingly, apparent retention rates from the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Schools 2010* report are typically between 72% to 82% across years 7 to 12 in NSW and Victoria, across all school affiliations; this is relevant to how and why students come to our two Schools.

The *Learning Choices Review 2012* report (Council of Australian Government, 2012) sets the Federal Government's targets and policies:

The National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions was negotiated between the Australian Federal, State and Territory governments through the Council of Australian Governments (CoAG) in 2009. As part of this, all governments agreed to a target to raise the Year 12 (or equivalent) attainment rate from 83.5% in 2009 to 90% by 2015 (CoAG, 2009, p.7)<sup>1</sup>. The relevant 'performance benchmark' (CoAG, 2009, p.14) clarifies the 90% target as 'the proportion of young people aged 20 to 24 who have attained Year 12 or a Certificate II or above', Year 12 leads to the standard senior secondary certificate. Certificate II is a vocational qualification, predominantly provided by state-run Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Colleges and some private 'registered training organisations'.

To achieve this major new target, three related policies have been agreed to:

- 1 A new minimum requirement for young people to complete junior Secondary School (Year 10, usually at age 15 or 16). The new agreement involves a shift from a simple age-based requirement to a combination of attainment and age.
- 2 A 'learn or earn' policy, which requires young people to be in full-time schooling, recognised training or paid employment (or a mix of these) until they turn 17.
- 3 Restrictions on access to welfare benefits for young people aged under 21, if they have not yet attained a Year 12 or equivalent qualification.

It is worth noting that although the second policy above is for a 'participation' requirement, the common public impression is that it is now compulsory to stay in school, until age 17. This is especially evident in New South Wales, where the state policy refers to 'the new school leaving age' (NSW DET, 2009), but also applies to the other states and territories. The federal government refers to this set of policies as a Compact with young Australians. In return for the Year 10 completion requirement, 'learn or earn' participation requirement and welfare benefit restrictions outlined above, the federal government pledges 'an entitlement to an education or training place' (DEEWR, 2011). In practice, this means that the Compact promises young

people a government-subsidised study or training place, as long as a place is available and subject to admission requirements.

For the majority of young people who already complete Year 12 or an equivalent (almost 84%), this may not matter very much. The remaining minority of young people, who traditionally have left formal education 'early', for whatever reason, will put the CoAG target and associated policies to the test.

This test determines our program responses at the Albury Wodonga Community College.

Recent research '*A Second Chance at Education for Early School Leavers 2012*' (Polidano, Tabasso & Tseng, 2012, found that:

- the longer a teenager stays away from study, the less likely they are to return (65% lower chance of returning to school after being out of school for one year),
- dropping out of school diminishes a student's chances of finding and retaining a job,
- coercive measures may be needed to bolster a teenagers chances to re-engage in study,
- females are 20% less likely to re-engage in formal education after leaving school because they were not willing to undertake vocational training.

This supports our experience through six years of alternative education programs.

Finally, the University of Melbourne (Polidano, C., Tabasso, D., & Tseng, Y. 2012. research found that 'about 60% of children from low SES-households finish high school compared to 90% of children from more affluent households. Further, parents on lower incomes are more likely to favour vocational training courses, which have no school completion prerequisites, over University courses'.



*Classes incorporate physical fitness which builds self-esteem and trust, Wodonga 2011.*

## **Part 2: The Albury Wodonga Community College**

### **Background of the College**

The Albury Wodonga Community College has been a key educational contributor in the local region for nearly 40 years. As an Adult and Community Education provider principally, its origins are based in the advancement and support of lifelong learning opportunities. The following pages highlight this history and describe the multiple pathways towards our current school alternatives of today.

The College was one of the key instigators of the Municipality of Wodonga declaring itself in 2000 as Australia's first *Learning City*, with the notion of a collective community of learning. A learning community is one which aims at social and economic regeneration, an important part of creating and sustaining thriving local communities.

The College was also a founding member of other peak bodies, including Adult Community Education Victoria Inc., the Australian Learning Communities Network Inc., and Community Colleges Australia Limited.

### **The Village of Learning**

The College's programs cater for the needs and interests of young people, disadvantaged people, Secondary School students in Years 9 to 12, the general community, indigenous artists, third age learners, workplaces and businesses. We have also extended our range of activities to cater for the early years learning, through mobile education and child care, in-venue childcare, preschools and kindergartens.

The Albury Wodonga Community College has been an innovative provider of these programs and has sought to deliver education in creative ways which successfully reach out to people, especially disadvantaged groups and hard-to-reach learners. It has always sought to be a progressive and resourceful organisation, with a guiding direction that is open to new ideas.

### **The Community College Network**

As truly lifelong learning organisations located in metropolitan, regional and rural locations, Community Colleges are strategically placed to provide a focus on individual and student welfare, with commitment to the employment outcomes for the individual.

Community Colleges offer flexible, responsive, non-institutional, but accredited vocational delivery; they also have strong links with industry, job networks and community service associations, as well as links with Indigenous, disability and welfare representative groups.

### **Adult and Community Education Organisations**

Adult and Community Education (ACE) is used widely and often loosely in Australia, to refer to Adult and Community Education. It is variously described as 'further education', 'access', 'community education', 'basic education', 'literacy and numeracy' where it can be facilitated in a wide variety of settings, but principally where the intent is about learning but the likely, direct outcome is not vocational.

Importantly, all successful community-based organisations like ACE recognise the value of food, particularly regular, healthy and social eating, as a way of attracting, engaging and benefiting men and women in social and community activities. (Golding. 2009.) It can be as simple as a shared 'cuppa', lunch together in a men's shed, or a picnic during a group outing. This principle, seemingly innocuous at first, has been found to be equally applicable in the success of the College's *Youth Pathways* and Independent Schools. It is a circumstance that existed in the Albury Wodonga Community College from when youth programs were emerging

## ***Eat Well, Do Well***

In 2010, our School commenced the planning and development of an *Eat Well Do Well* Program underpinned by research, support and implemented practices from world-renowned researcher, Professor Derek Colquhoun (University of Hull, UK) who visited our Wodonga School in 2008.

We established the foundation of a long term health-based project through:

- initial teacher professional development, and
- implementing healthy eating habits across the typical school day.

The ethos of the *Eat Well, Do Well* Program is that healthy students will instinctively perform better.

Professor Colquhoun's found an interdependent relationship between health and education. His research discovered that, while good health is determined by what we eat, what we eat is increasingly influenced by behavioural changes in society, having consequential impacts on:

- our quality of life;
- our capacity to learn;
- healthy and participatory civic outcomes; and
- productivity in the workforce.

Professor Colquhoun, while detailing a wide range of societal changes, drivers and consequences, typified the potential problems ahead with the following photo image (2009 International Health and Education Think Tank powerpoint presentation, Hull UK) of an eight year-old UK student's daily packed lunch for school:

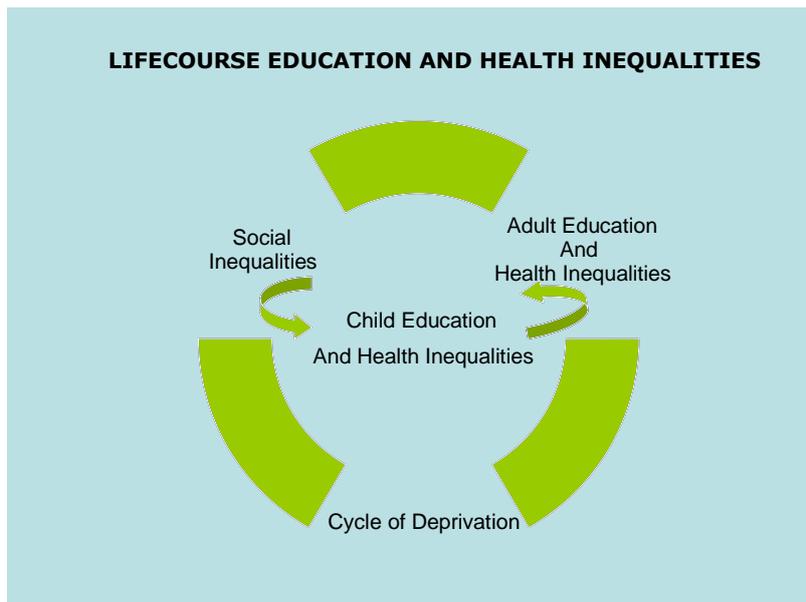


*A UK student's packed school lunch*

It would appear that the family considered this healthy and appropriate. This is not a comment on the family concerned, rather the change in our society that has resulted in such convenience and beliefs. While our student cohort is older (15+ years), the image is equally representative of the poor nutritional habits of the majority of our students.

Additional research, both international and Australian, confirms the links between educational outcomes and healthy lifestyles. What is not as prevalent are school practices to change student behaviours, particularly over the long term, when the subject group are in their mid to late teens.

Professor Colquhoun's 2009 research further shows, as demonstrated in the diagram below, that education and health links are interwoven:



*Lifecourse Education and Health Inequalities*

The *Eat Well Do Well* Project at our Wodonga, and later Albury, Schools necessitated increased professional development for our teachers, particularly in relation to our student group.

The research undertaken of our students' performance and in-school observations shows that encouraging student access to food and water at no cost has had a significant impact on student behaviours and attitudes. Students regularly report the positive effects of access to food and their increased school attention levels.

Today, the *Eat Well, Do Well* Project continues successfully in our Schools through the supply of water and food including at breakfast clubs, along with cooking classes and Certificate qualifications in Bakery and Home Economics.



*Students shopping – learning to plan healthier meal alternatives, Wodonga 2010.*

## Pre Independent Schools

In the years before the creation of our Independent School, we offered a number of programs funded annually by the Victorian State Government, in particular one called *Youth Pathways*. This program was an extension of an earlier (2003) program known as *Managed Individual Pathways* (MIPs).

An even earlier entry into youth education was a pilot program attempted by the College in 2002 in response to a small group of 12 young people, aged 14 to 17 years, who had not attended school regularly for some two years prior. The College conducted a five month active learning project, *Breaking Ground*, funded with \$30,000 from Tenix and \$2000 from the Albury North Rotary Club.

The 12 students achieved an 87% attendance rate. This surprise result contrasted with their attendance rate in Secondary School education in the two years prior of less than 12%. In fact, one student who had been a complete school refuser in the previous 18 months achieved an 83% attendance rate, with another similar refuser in the previous 13 months achieving a 98% attendance rate in the *Breaking Ground* program. Whilst there were not a lot of purposeful data captured, nor tracking of students from this project, what it did do was awaken the Albury Wodonga Community College to the notion that the facilities, people, support and messages of enjoyable learning could provide a meaningful alternative to disengaged young people. Although little further research information is retrievable from this project, it was the embryo from which all of our future in and out of school success would come.

*“Breaking Ground was not only at the cutting edge, it was very nearly at the bleeding edge.”*  
Rodney Wangman, Principal, Company Newsletter, April 2003

## Youth Pathways - A Snapshot

The 2004 funding target for the Albury Wodonga Community College *Youth Pathways* Program was set at 10,000 Student Contact Hours (SCH) with a suggested breakdown of 25 students each completing 400 SCH over the four-term year.

The program was structured to deliver, as the core study:

- Certificate I in Business (205 nominal hours)
- Certificate II in Hospitality (240 nominal hours)
- Certificate II in Retail (390 nominal hours)
- Certificate II in Information Technology (400 nominal hours)

Additional opportunities were offered in the following depending on the participant's interest in these specialised career pathways:

- Multimedia (490 nominal hours)
- Children's Services (355 nominal hours)
- Business (350 nominal hours)

The program was established to offer the maximum flexibility and provide a course structure that guaranteed the suggested delivery of 400 SCH per student.

Due to an exceptional attendance level, delivery was in the 15,000–16,000 SCH range, with thirteen students graduating with either three full Certificates each, and all at least achieving a Statement of Attainment in three of the abovementioned industry areas.

## **Youth Pathways - Participants, Program and Staff**

As set out in the Victorian State Government 2004 Agreement, the young people enrolled in the *Youth Pathways* Program were aged 15 to 19 years and had left school before attaining a Year 12 (or equivalent) certificate. Priority consideration was given to young people who had left school at Year 10 or earlier, and were unemployed.

The background of these young people and their education experiences before attending this program considerably influenced its shape and trajectory. We aimed to offer an intervention to these young people that would eventually unravel the disappointments, exclusions, scarring and labels which had brought them to the *Youth Pathways* Program.

At the commencement of the 2004 program, an initial group of 29 young people enrolled in the *Youth Pathways* Program, eight later withdrew:

- three who relocated outside the area
- one who found employment
- one who decided to attend a course at TAFE; and
- three who realised the subjects were unsuitable to their current needs.

Of the twenty-nine total, 15 were from NSW and 14 from Victoria including feeder towns such as Howlong, Chiltern, Tallangatta and Huon. The gender ratio was surprisingly weighted in the direction of female participants; of the 29 enrolments, 21 were females and eight were males. Excluding another four sporadic attendees and the eight 'withdrawals', the classroom profile was 17 regular participants - 12 young women and five young men, an approximate ratio of 2:1.

In response to the personalised mapping exercise that preceded enrolment, the young people structured their educational path in a variety of ways. Two of the young people requested enrolment only in Certificate III in Children's Services. One only attended Certificate III in Multimedia. Two of the students also studied Children's Services and one young woman found that Retail/Business classes suited her needs. Three of the participants added a Responsible Serving of Alcohol Certificate to their qualifications, once they were eighteen years old. Two under 15 year old students were accepted into the Multimedia course to be undertaken in conjunction with their Secondary School education program.

The fees for the additional courses (Children's Services and Responsible Serving of Alcohol) were paid by the Albury Wodonga Community College as the young people most in need of these qualifications were unable to meet the extra costs ( \$860 and \$180 respectively) of this training.

Prior to enrolment, each participant underwent a pre-enrolment interview/assessment to draw out further information to support their pathway management. In a multiple choice response to the question "Have you ever experienced any of the following?"

- 15 identified themselves as having **unstable living or family relationships**.
- 15 articulated **low motivation or self-esteem**.
- 12 selected **mental health as an issue** that affected them.
- 12 highlighted **drug & alcohol use**.
- 12 identified **numeracy/literacy concerns**.
- 11 flagged **homelessness** as an experience they had encountered.

In summary, between 40% and 50% of participants had been in situations that required external specialist service intervention. Accordingly, our training approach reflected a strength-based, client-directed and solution-focussed ethos to generate the change cycles that enabled the young people to lift *themselves* over the obstacles limiting their vision at the time.

Information gathered about the participants' most recent enrolments in traditional education showed they came from a variety of schools within the Albury/Wodonga catchment (seven) and beyond (eight):

- Albury High School
- Catholic College Wodonga
- James Fallon High School
- Mitchell Secondary College
- Murray High School
- Wodonga High School
- Wodonga West Secondary College
- Beechworth Secondary College
- Benalla Secondary College
- Billabong High School
- Koorinal Secondary College
- Myrtleford Secondary College
- Palmerston High School.
- Tallangatta Secondary College
- Tumut Secondary College

Combined with the postcode/residential data, this provoked consideration of the twin issues of transport and accommodation.

Of the total 29 *Youth Pathways* Program enrolments, only ten students resided with their families at the time of engagement. Without the secure, supportive involvement of an adult carer in their lives, two-thirds of the young people attending the Program struggled to meet the financial requirements of their daily existence, let alone the additional demands associated with education and employment.

The level of poverty for young people on a benefit that ranges from \$120 to \$220 per week (2004 figures) can only be fully comprehended over time. When participants wear the same clothes and shoes every day, health suffers due to poor nutrition, and conversations about prostitution and drug dealing are mooted as viable revenue raising ventures, the full impact of the students' situations becomes harrowingly real. And yet, in the 2004 group of participants, there was a core group of about nine young people who lived independently and still managed to get themselves to class three days a week, weather and personal conditions notwithstanding, to learn skills that would lead them out of this heartbreaking cycle.

As well as linking participants to outside services, the Albury Wodonga Community College made one-off financial contributions to some individuals' food and clothing needs (for job interviews), as well as covering travel costs (\$3,580). It was not the core business of the program to address these issues but, when critical needs were present, it was important to have some discretionary power to alleviate the immediacy of the situation and build trust and rapport with the young people. Care was taken to avoid promoting a culture of 'rescue', as each young person needed to be actively engaged in his or her own problem solving in order to truly participate in an emancipatory political decision regarding their own future.

Three-quarters of the way through the *Youth Pathways* Program, the participants' skills were encouraged, expanded and challenged by formal work experience. Fifty percent of the students had identified their main reason for leaving school as "I want a job". The work placements resulted in a range of positive outcomes, but reinforced our tutor support as critical to raising the young person's self-esteem, confidence and basic workplace skill sets to the point where they could continue with little back-up support.

The *Youth Pathways* Program, while limited in many ways, gave us our first true signs over an extended period of the needs and magic that could be applied to have a positive local impact and which led us to begin the thinking of a long-term education alternative.

The two programs, *Breaking Ground* and *Youth Pathways*, helped determine our organisational foundation policy frameworks around low/no cost fees, small class sizes, the *Village of Learning* principle of connections to adults in education, additional literacy/numeracy assistance, modified teaching approaches, transport and accommodation, clothing, and medical support. While not formally evident or recorded at the time, retrospectively it has become clear that often availability to short and accessible out of school hours support and guidance was another determining factor in our student connection and persistence with us. Some of these matters were as a consequence of issues that had been intergenerational for students.



*Students conducting their own ANZAC Day ceremony, Wodonga 2012.*

## Part 3: Creation of the Wodonga and Albury Schools

### Wodonga School 2006 to 2009

*"We must look like a cherry in a truck load of watermelons"*  
Rodney Wangman, Principal, Official School Opening 28<sup>th</sup> August 2006

On January 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, the Albury Wodonga Community College Independent School commenced. We were convinced that we could provide an alternative to existing school education but with a pathway that would see students complete as equals with mainstream institutionalised school students.

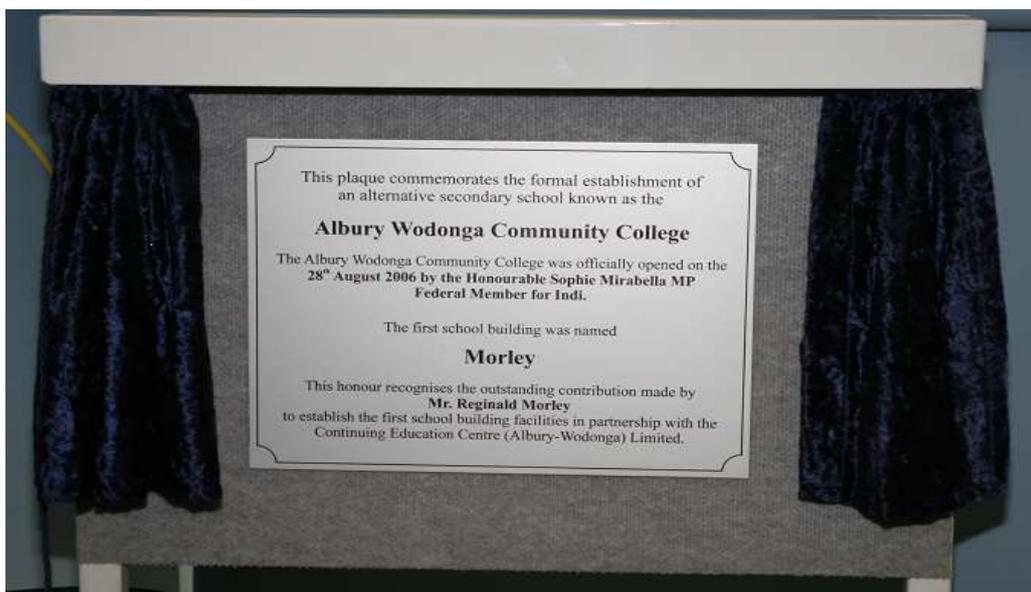
Victoria's newest and smallest school began with skepticism from a school sector unsure of how a not-for-profit, adult education regional company would attract and keep students already disengaged, unhappy and unemployed. The silver lining was probably that we were so different that no-one knew what to expect. We didn't look, feel, smell or sound like a normal Secondary School.

While all policy, procedural and teacher/curriculum matters had been satisfied, the concept of a school purposefully enrolling 15 to 19 year-old students already out of school, seemed both inspiring and foolhardy at the same time. But we did and, as they say, the rest is history...



*Opening of the first School building*

Our first school building is named after 86-year-old Reg Morley (pictured above left), who volunteered over \$100,000 of time and effort to create the Wodonga School.



*Commemorative plaque for the Wodonga School, 28<sup>th</sup> August 2006.*

## Years 2006 to 2009

The majority (at the time 80%) of our students were not living at home and survived independently away from any strong family connection or financial support. This had a range of impacts. As just one example, we learned in our first year, in attempting a Debutante Ball, that the traditional dance between our Debutantes and their fathers was impossible for many, given family separation issues and conflict.

Other important things including appointment and support of school captains, providing welfare support, a safe place to come away from family/other relationships, medical assistance, advocacy support, food and clothing, while relatively normal traditional school environments, created an extra learning curve for the early teachers and tutors employed for alternative school curriculum delivery.



*Debutante Ball, Albury 2010.*

The growth of our School was unexpected. During those first few years, students in the most part came to us by word of mouth and because, as most articulated, "We heard you are different". The interpretation of that 'difference' varied among young people, and sometimes caused consternation among representatives of the respective State School Authorities. Often the small size and flexibility of using combined school and adult education facilities for our students caused concern. Ultimately, however, regular visitors could see from the student profile that we needed different learner facilities to reduce negative attitudes and feelings before positive educational steps could begin. What inevitably saved the day was the availability of a larger, strong, financial and proactive parent Community College which could reach outwards through the local community, to gain assistance and influence for students moving through our School.

School fees were not charged until 2009 and only then at \$160 pa, with a concession rate of \$60. Even today, our Schools do not exclude any student who is unable to pay their student fees; typically, we receive about 40% of the total published fees.

## 2008 Independent Schools Victoria - Survey Results

By 2008, Independent Schools Victoria was a core support agency for the Albury Wodonga Community College. This provided an independent mechanism to review our student satisfaction.

The following results of our 2008 student cohort provided a strong validation of our approach, given the needs and difficulty of expectations from the student base we sought to assist.

2008 Student Satisfaction Results	
Review Area	Summary
Curriculum/Academic Program	Satisfaction levels were <b>considerably higher</b> than mean.
Teaching Quality	Satisfaction levels were <b>exceptionally higher</b> than mean.
Learning Outcomes	Satisfaction levels were <b>substantially higher</b> than mean.
Personal Development/Leadership	Satisfaction levels were <b>considerably higher</b> than mean.
Pastoral Care	Satisfaction levels were <b>substantially higher</b> than mean.
Resources/Co-curricular Activities	Satisfaction levels were <b>remarkably higher</b> than mean.
Transition	Satisfaction levels were <b>considerably higher</b> than mean.
School Ethos/Values	Satisfaction levels were <b>somewhat higher</b> than mean.
Total Student Satisfaction	Overall, across the eight domains, <b>substantially higher</b> than mean
<b>Overall Rating</b>	Scores show we were <b>exceptionally higher</b> than the school sector mean, with a median score of 90% (Reference group mean 80%)

The following written student comment epitomizes the sentiment we had been striving for:

This school has been excellent. It is an adult environment that has helped me grow as a person. My self esteem and self worth has considerably improved. They also are understanding and lenient when it comes to dealing with my children, who attend the day care centre at the school.



*AWCC Thunderstruck Team with Wilson Transformer's General Manager, Jon Retford (centre back). Wodonga 2006.*

## Our Students 2006 to 2009

The following photos of our years 2006 to 2008 students shows the faces of achievement – we are proud of each student who took the risk to re-engage and become greater contributors to our community then and in the years ahead.



*Students and teachers on an excursion to Canberra 2006*



*2007 students and teachers*



*2008 students and teachers*

## Student Achievements

The following tables show the level of achievement realised by students of the alternative School across years 2006 to 2009.

2006 to 2009 Full and Partial Completions of VCAL						
Year	No. of Students at Census	Year 11 Completion		Year 12 Completion		Returned to further education or moved into employment
		Full	Part	Full	Part	
2006	31	32%	36%	64%	29%	61%
2007	62	37%	37%	63%	21%	86%
2008	79	44%	14%	55%	45%	77%
2009	93	18%	54%	38%	38%	60%

2006 to 2009 Certificate and academic achievement					
Results/Year including number of students at census		2006 31 students	2007 62 students	2008 79 students	2009 93 students
<b>Certificate I</b>	Full Certificate issued		18	12	50
	Statement of Attainment issued	1	6	13	23
<b>Certificate II</b>	Full Certificate issued	26	24	36	10
	Statement of Attainment issued	31	29	16	43
<b>Certificate III</b>	Full Certificate issued		13	7	
	Statement of Attainment issued	5	18	18	
<b>Total qualifications gained</b>		63	108	102	126

The Certificates issued included the following:

- Business
- Animal Studies
- Hospitality
- Multimedia
- Community Services
- Children's Services
- Retail
- Information Technology
- Hairdressing
- Visual Arts/Craft
- Work Preparation
- Certificate of General Education for Adults
- Engineering
- Music Technology

## **Albury School**

By 2008, it was becoming very obvious that our intention to assist 50 students per year was well below the local need. Data showed that at least 25% of our students were travelling from Albury, NSW, to attend the alternative School in Wodonga, Victoria. Discussions with Youth Emergency Services indicated there was a cohort of potential students who could not travel to Wodonga.

A review of our student intake gave us reason to believe that another school in Albury would be of benefit. Equally, there was a high level of requests from other schools, parents, students and community leaders for us to offer additional school levels of years 7 to 10.

Following another process of application, presentation, inspection and agreement we opened a second School purposely located near a light industrial estate, in South Albury. Our building facilities were set up for approximately 70 students from years 9 to 12.

Our Albury School commenced operation in January, 2010.



*Albury School building, 2011.*

## **Two Systems of Education**

### **Victoria**

The Wodonga School is registered by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) (formerly the Registered Schools Board) and must undergo re-registration every five years. The School is registered to deliver the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), a competency-based program of Literacy, Numeracy, Work Related Skills and Personal Development Skills delivered to students in Years 11 and 12 who can be assessed at three levels – Foundation, Intermediate and Senior.

The auditing/quality assurance of the VCAL Curriculum we are required to participate in is VCAL Quality Assurance, conducted by the Victorian Certification and Assessment Authority (VCAA). The VCAA is the authority which issues VCAL qualifications to the students on completion of their studies.

There is significant flexibility with VCAL and each component is based on specific nominal hours, which allows students to work at their own pace. Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs form a significant part of the VCAL curriculum and provide numerous alternatives for students in making up their program of study.

## New South Wales

The Albury School is registered and accredited to deliver the years 9 to 12 mainstream curriculum to students by the New South Wales Board of Studies. The Board of Studies issues the qualifications to the students on completion of their study.

In years 9 and 10 students must study English, Maths, Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE), History, Geography and Science. There is no flexibility in this program. There is also a non-negotiable requirement to deliver a certain number of SCH for each subject. It is a breach of the registration requirements to not deliver the required SCH. Students complete six subjects in year 11 and five in year 12, with the only compulsory subject in both years being English. We must deliver 120 SCH per subject. We offer the following additional subjects:

- Community & Family Studies (with exams)
- PDHPDE (with exams)
- Work Studies (with exams)
- English Studies (with no exams)
- Applied Maths (with no exams) and
- Vocational Education and Training or Distance Education (delivered by an outside provider) to make up the remaining subject.

For the School's registration, the Board of Studies audited each of the complete learning programs for all subjects which had to be documented by term two; this was a very thorough audit which will be repeated every five years.

The Board will only approve other alternatives for Albury students, such as a Certificate 1 in General Education for Adults (CGEA) for year 9 students, if the students DO NOT enrol in the School. The program must be approved by an outside Registered Training Organisation (RTO). Students can enrol in the individual program and then transfer into the School's 'mainstream' Board of Studies school program at the appropriate time.



*Student Graduation, Albury 2011.*

## Years 2010 to 2012

When the Albury School was opened, the College provided a table similar to that below to highlight the Schools' focus that had been refined to take into account student needs and expectations since 2006.

<b>Albury Wodonga Community College – Helping Our Student Cohort in 2010</b>		
<b>Offering students....</b>	<b>As a practitioner who....</b>	<b>A school who....</b>
An <b>inviting and supportive</b> environment that helps each student feel comfortable.	Delivers <b>clearly structured training, using methods that suit the skill</b> of the student.	<b>Provides access</b> to appropriate support services.
Training that <b>builds confidence and skills</b> .	Uses curriculum that is <b>linked to the real-life demands</b> of students' lives.	Has <b>partnerships/links</b> with other organisations that can support students.
<b>Flexible learning</b> environments that provide useful learning, relevant to student requirements.	Works with students <b>to identify their learning interests</b> and appropriate assessment procedures.	<b>Links with employers</b> to provide training that supports employees, as well as meeting the requirements of the employer.
Inclusive course design and assessment that <b>encourages students to persist</b> .	<b>Supports students</b> , by identifying their learning needs and responding to these in their program.	<b>Operates on a sustainable business model</b> and seeks and secures adequate funding, to support training delivery.
<b>Links with employers</b> to support movement from training to employment.	Provides <b>flexible course design and delivery</b> .	<b>Carries out rigorous evaluation</b> of training programs and reflects on findings.
<b>Mentors</b> who can support students to achieve their aims and aspirations.	<b>Embeds literacy</b> into other learning as appropriate, to support student achievement.	Gives appropriate <b>career guidance</b> , to engage and retain students.
Strategies to <b>build persistence</b> and overcome barriers that are outside our control.	<b>Takes account of the variation</b> in students' reading and writing skills, in designing assessment.	Provides <b>taster courses</b> to draw in hard-to-reach students and provide learning experiences.
<b>Access to support services</b> that help to reduce the barriers to learning.	<b>Builds skills</b> of students, to encourage confidence.	<b>Understands the learner market</b> , which is the target to the intended training.
<b>Appropriate course material and design</b> that takes account of factors such as cultural background and age.	<b>Provides next steps</b> for students to engage in higher levels of education and training.	Provides support for students to <b>overcome barriers</b> , thereby <b>reducing attrition</b> .
<b>Timely career advice</b> , to assist with transitional pathways, <b>giving purpose to student learning</b> .		Develops programs <b>collaboratively with the community</b> .

More sharply and simply, our three major School Goals for 2012 and 2013 are to increase:

- 1 Student attendance
- 2 Student retention/return across successive years
- 3 Student motivation.

## Part 4: Methodology/Results/Analysis

### ***My School***

In presenting the results of this research, the analysis begins again on reaffirming the targeted student cohort. The following five areas of assessment results as published by the *Herald-Sun* on the 5<sup>th</sup> March 2011 based on data taken from the Federal Government's *My School* website, indicate the student base the Wodonga School has supported. In Victoria, across all Secondary Schools, the ratings for the Albury Wodonga Community College students were as follows:

<b>Wodonga School Assessment Results and State MySchool Rankings 2010</b>			
<b>Area of Assessment</b>	<b>Result</b>	<b>Secondary Average</b>	<b>Ranking</b>
Reading	504	574	Last
Spelling	523	579	Tenth Last
Grammar/Punctuation	467	579	Last
Writing	420	568	Second Last
Numeracy	534	585	Eighth Last

These results should be viewed against the backdrop of the students having the fifth lowest score in the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage and the School receiving the ninth lowest funding of all Independent Schools in Victoria.

It is surmised that the results for the Albury School would vary only marginally from the Victorian analysis.

### **Student Demographic**

The research information contained in this report is only a summary of much broader and detailed individual student data. The following data definitions and response results are from the 2010, 2011 and 2012 data for more than 600 students. The non-academic data have been collected and recorded from the student's course start dates to the end of their annual enrolment.

*Attendance:* Defined as not only coming to class, but also participating in class discussions and undertaking class work. History has shown us that students who attend for more than 25% of the time can progress positively in some aspect towards their educational/learning/employment/family aspirations.

- A student identified as 'Enrolled Only', has either not attended at all or attended only once or twice.
- Other attendance is recorded as infrequent (25% or lower) Irregular (26% to 50%) or frequent (51% to 100%)

*Completed or Positive Withdrawal:*

- The student has completed the course with or without a pass
- The student has not completed the course and the reason they left, eg 'left school due to wellbeing issues'.

*Alcohol and Other Drugs:* Identifies whether a student drinks alcohol and/or smokes cigarettes or marijuana or uses other drugs.

*Mental Illness:* Identifies whether a student has been diagnosed with a mental illness by a medical practitioner or the student has acknowledged that they suffer from a mental illness but have not consulted a practitioner regarding this. Medication information is also recorded and how long the diagnosed/undiagnosed mental illness has been experienced, along with the type of illness for general interest only.

*Case Worker:* Identifies where a student has receive some extra assistance via a case worker for any of the issues the student has experienced. There may have been more than one worker assisting the young person.

*Family Relationships:* Many of our students experience family issues that can result in them leaving home, staying with friends for a period of time and/or needing to go to a refuge. An unstable family relationship is defined as the young person not getting along with one particular family member or there being continual disruption and/or arguments, resulting in the possible departure from the family home. This also can lead to negative family support in relation to the young person studies/well being. For instance, the student may still live in the family home, but may get negative support from a particular family member.

*Corrective or Protective Services:*

- Corrective Services involvement relates to the young person being involved in criminal activity; this can range from being charged by police and placed on a court order, to receiving a caution with no conviction.
- Protective Services involvement is where the young person and their family has child protection involvement and are placed in 'out of home care' and the state is the custodial guardian.

*Motivation and Self Esteem:* Students are asked about their motivation/attitude in relation to attending school. At the enrolment interview students are also asked about their self-esteem and this is captured in the data where they have responded. This is also assessed by the welfare workers.



*Bakery students Wodonga, 2012.*

## Student Analysis: Knowing our Students, 2010 to 2012 non-academic data

Around 200 students per year genuinely enquire about our Schools. In 2010, 20% of these did not follow up and attend classes. In 2011 and 2012, 10% did not follow up and attend classes.

These results show the difficulty in selling the 'alternative' to students. Students also struggled initially with the approach to reading and writing expectations. Timetabling of 'every' day, versus longer days but fewer days makes us look more like a normal school. Teacher understanding and engagement was lower, given our 'newness'. The VCAL model helped with the frequency of attendance issue, as the total days of attendance are less, i.e. lower impact. Maturity levels of Wodonga students, assists the higher outcome.

From 2013, the Albury School, with the approval of the NSW Board of Studies, will deliver an agreed and modified VCAL model. We anticipate that this will result in higher student enrolments.

### *Attendance:*

- **Irregular** (26% to 50% attendance) - around 23%
- **Frequent** (51% to 100%) - 40%

Wodonga's **Frequent** attendees were between 130% and 200% more likely to attend than Albury's – these links are known to be related to student maturity, Centrelink benefits, and the different delivery environment.

### *Completed or Positive Withdrawal:*

- 60% to 70%

The result for Albury was higher than that for Wodonga.

Of the remaining 40% to 30% of non-completing students in this group:

- Around 7% **withdrew due to leaving our region.**
- Around 13% **withdrew due to wellbeing issues.**
- around 15% (except for Albury in 2010 -29%) **withdrew through lack of interest.**

Students who did not follow up and attend classes combined with those who withdrew through lack of interest gives a combined average of 25% of the total of all students who sought our alternative Schools. This indicates that even these alternatives did not suit them and is the key reason we initiated an 'out of school' program *2cool4school*.

### *Alcohol and Other Drugs:*

From 2010 to 2012:

- 50% of Albury students and 40% of Wodonga students indicated they **drank alcohol** at times.
- At commencement 60% of our students, admitted **smoking.**
- 20% of students indicate they had **used marijuana** at times.
- 2% of students or less indicated that they had taken **any other form of drugs** over the last two years.

While smoking is allowed, there are many programs and opportunities to reduce smoking use dramatically, particularly for pregnant students. In one year, there were 22 smokers at commencement but only two by the end of the year as a consequence of 're-education'. In our view this would not have occurred had we insisted on a non-smoking policy which may have resulted in these students rejecting our schooling alternative altogether.

### *Mental Illness:*

- 23% of our students had a **diagnosed and/or undiagnosed mental illness**, in most cases identified within the previous 12 months.
- 9% of students took **prescribed medication.**

The two main types of illness were **Depression and Anxiety** impacting 25% of students at any one time.

### *Case Worker:*

- 30% of students had at least one **caseworker**; some have had up to four caseworkers.

*Family Relationships:*

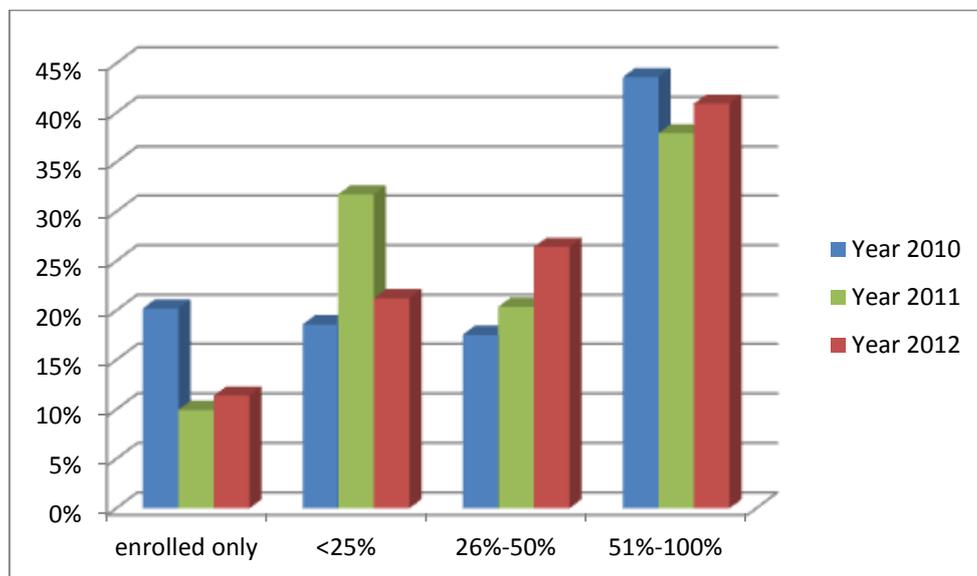
- 7% of students **had children** and are the only or primary caregiver.
- 28% of students had **unstable family relationships**.
- 16% indicated **negative family support**, in most cases occurring during the previous 12 months.
- 18% had left home, with almost all experiencing **homelessness** as a consequence. Typically 14% were homeless at any one time, again typically in the previous twelve months. Almost no students returned home, with the majority living with friends before achieving independent living.

*Corrective or Protective Services:*

- 25% of students have either **Corrective or Protective Services Issues**, almost all occurring during the previous 12 months.

*Motivation and Self-Esteem:*

- 43% of students indicated they had **Low Motivation**. This figure was twice as high in Albury as it was in Wodonga, perhaps due to the Year 9 and 10 cohort who were yet to experience pathways and careers and work experience.
- 26% of students indicated they had **Low Self-Esteem**.
- 28% of students indicated they had **Low Confidence**.
- 20% of students indicated they had **Negative Friends**.

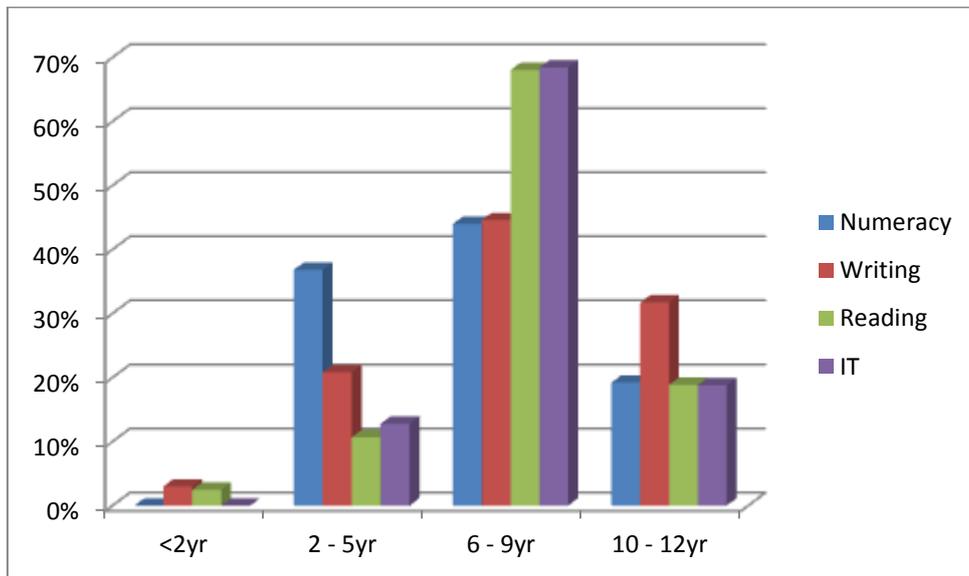


2010 to 2012 Attendance (Wodonga and Albury)

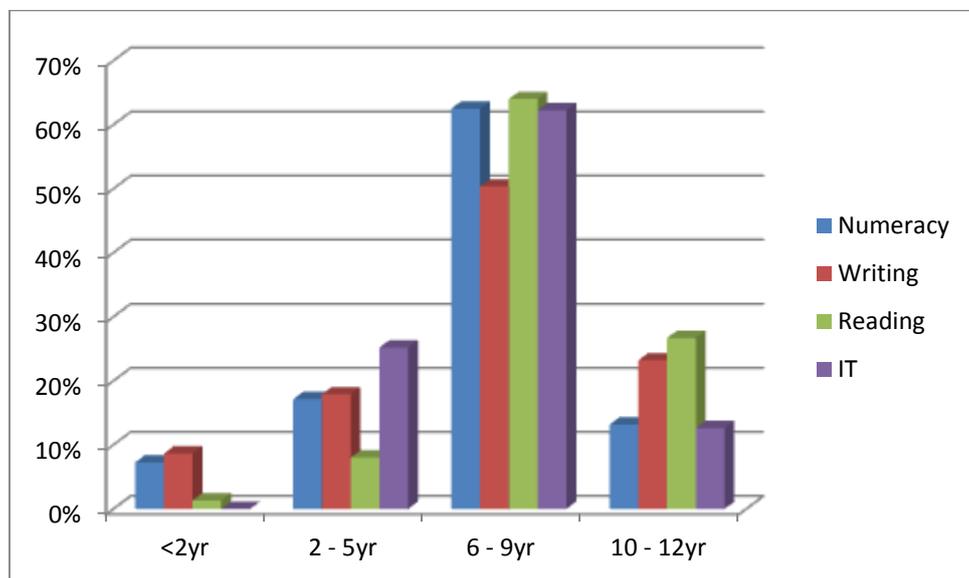
2012-2012 attendance

This graph shows the improvements in attendance, including at least trying school, from 2010 to 2012.

With around 60% student attendance we can contribute very positive educational outcomes. Given the student base has low previous school attendance history, these are very good results. The average of 10% who did not continue past enrolment, combined with the average of 15% who withdrew through lack of interest, are now the focus of a new 'out of school' program *2cool4school*. The graphs below show the 2011 and 2012 students' academic ability at enrolment.



*Albury Years 2011 and 2012: Previous academic achievement*



*Wodonga Years 2011 and 2012: Previous academic achievement*

These graphs show the results of our own assessments of the 2011 and 2012 students' previous academic achievement. They do not provide a comparison of the change achieved during the years, as individual students were not tracked; rather they represent our assessed level of academic levels, across four skill sets, of the students in each year. The simple analysis is that our students had had, on average, much lower academic achievement through their previous years of schooling than we had anticipated. By using Information Technology (IT) as an intellectual capacity measure, we discovered that higher learning abilities are evident than had otherwise been developed through past school attendance. The results show that 70% to 80% of our students are at educational levels below their age/year expectations.

## Quantitative Research

Research results from a sample taken during 2012 of more than 20% of past students from the 2006 to 2009 and 2010 to 2012 programs shows the following:

Preparedness for future:

- 90% stated that the School was excellent in preparing students to participate in further education.
- 82% rated the School as excellent in preparing people to participate in the workforce.
- 84% stated that the School was excellent in preparing people to participate in the community.
- 25% stated that they had achieved employment while either at school or almost immediately after leaving, and that their experiences with the School would help them keep their job.

Future study or job training:

- 63% of students started studying or job training either part or full time within 12 months of leaving.

Intention to study in the future:

- 88% of the students who had not yet begun to study or undertake job training since attending the AWCC reported they intended to do so in the future.

Use of skills gained:

- 93% of graduates indicated that they were using the skills gained at the AWCC.

Wellbeing and health:

- 86% of students indicated that they were more self-confident and more positive after being at our Schools.
- 72% of students indicated they were either healthier, or sought to be healthier in the future.

## Qualitative Research

Our research survey and focus group sessions (refer Appendix 6) found that:

- most students were looking for direction in their life/career, and most had little or no discretionary income to spend on education.
- students spoke highly of the school content and said it had had a positive effect on their lives.
- students felt the *Eat Well, Do Well* initiative, paid transport, smaller class sizes, high level of Welfare Officer support and links to adult education, helped them.
- students learnt from the School that they could set goals and achieve them.
- a key success was the positive change in student attitudes and behaviours.
- both students and staff agreed that student behaviour at school had noticeably changed for the better.
- students found staff 'warm, welcoming and encouraging'.
- the process of enrolling was straightforward, forms were easily obtained and easy to fill out.
- the impact of the School was overwhelmingly positive for almost all interviewed.

## **Reflection on the Links between Learning and Wellbeing**

This research has aimed to actively 'join dots' that are seldom considered. Learning is conventionally and increasingly considered to be individual, personal and cerebral and necessarily associated with education, training professionals and 'providers'. Health and wellbeing have conventionally and historically been regarded as being in the domain of health professionals and directed to 'fixing' individuals, once they are 'broken'.

From student interviews, School exit surveys and observations, our efforts at providing healthy eating options supported by classroom exercises focused on individual and family health have been embraced by a majority of students often over an extended period of time, and also outside the alternative school environment.

This research provides some new insights into the ways community-based organisations have the capability and capacity to join the learning 'dots' and the health and wellbeing 'dots' that are informal, effective, positive and therapeutic for students, in ways that formal learning and health approaches sometimes are not.

So what can these insights mean to the existing, established government and non-government secondary education sector, which is the base from which our student numbers/types come?

## **Motivating Factors that Re-engage Learning**

Our research has identified that alternative school learners have a range of different motivations for selecting our Schools; the majority of reasons they identify as to their choice to return to the classroom include:

- the alternative school is different
- their own personal development
- to meet employment expectations
- to resolve personal problems, for example, conflict resolution
- to make or maintain social relationships
- to escape from difficulties in their lives.

With these points in mind, our teachers can devise learning strategies that appeal to the motivating factors.

## **Analysis**

The Albury Wodonga Community College secondary education delivery alternatives are clearly achieving remarkable results. Put bluntly, the student base already lost from education who have voluntarily left or been requested to leave their former Secondary Schools have presented to us with some of the lowest levels of academic achievement in the State of Victoria. The students have had little or no positive experience of the institutional education system in which they were formerly enrolled. A range of family, social, community, financial and health issues is negatively impacting their lives. Once they enrol at the College their interest in learning is rekindled, as demonstrated by their attendance effort and accredited achievement in formal and measurable ways, and especially in the change to their willingness to re-engage with others in a positive belief in their future educational or employment success.

While not formally measured, the improvements witnessed in student levels of happiness, confidence and resilience and associated reductions in anger, inappropriate behaviour and despondency prove that the notion of alternative education can be highly successful for disengaged youth and is a necessary part of any Australian wide educational delivery system.

## Student Achievement 2010 to 2012

The following tables show the level of Certificate and academic achievement, realised by the students re-engaging back into our alternative School environment.

Student Achievement by Number of Students: 2010-2012									
Year	No. of Students at Census	Year 9 Completion	Year 10 Completion		Year 11 Completion		Year 12 Completion		Returned to further education or moved into employment
			Full	Part	Full	Part	Full	Part	
2010	189	31 (100%)	19%	25%	8%	49%	46%	54%	58%
2011	211	26 (100%)	48%	8%	21%	39%	32%	23%	79%
2012	193	13 (76%)	50%	18%	37%	49%	18%	26%	64%

Student Achievement by Qualification: 2010-2012				
Results/Year including number of students at census		2010 189 students	2011 211 students	2012 193 students
<b>Certificate I</b>	Full Certificate issued	2	5	18
	Statement of Attainment issued		9	18
<b>Certificate II</b>	Full Certificate issued	13	14	16
	Statement of Attainment issued	38	43	53
<b>Certificate III</b>	Full Certificate issued			3
	Statement of Attainment issued			10
<b>Total</b>		53	71	118

The Certificates issued included the following scope:

- Business
- Hospitality
- Community Services
- Information Technology
- Certificate of General Education for Adults
- Music Technology
- Bakery (Bread)



*A graduating student and family with the School Principal (right), Albury 2011.*

## Understanding the characteristics of hard-to-reach learners (analysis continued)

Pittham (2007.) suggests “little effort is made to contact or connect with the hard to reach [learners] and thus their voices can remain unheard and their needs and wants largely ignored”. This sentiment is the experience of our organisation, over our first six years of providing an alternative school model.

Professor Tony Vinson’s maps of disadvantage (2007.) show that Albury and Wodonga are locations with a ‘degree of advantage’. This knowledge, and consideration of the vast majority of other ‘less advantaged’ areas across Australia makes the work, analysis and future direction of our approach even more valuable. Given what we have achieved in our small model, the impact of this model could be even greater in other locations.

Dickie’s (2000.) segmentation of the learner market provides an overview of potential learners and their attitudes to learning. Dickie suggests that this market includes 30% who seek education that is ‘made easier’ or are ‘done with it’. These two categories probably contain the majority of hard-to-reach learners and, according to Dickie, include the typical student base we attract at the Albury Wodonga Community College. He identified useful strategies for recruiting potential learners in our category areas of interest, including promotion focus towards:

- increased attention on the expected gains and decreased attention on the cost of engaging in learning.
- repositioning of skills to show learning as an attractive option, which offers personal benefits, as well as a means to keep up with a rapidly changing world.
- addressing barriers to learning – real and perceived, for example, providing flexible learning options and mobile learning centres.
- improving people’s ability to engage in learning, for example, access to childcare.
- providing information on low cost, positive learning experiences, to overcome the barriers, for example, ‘how-to-learn’ products.
- creating interest in learning and skills development.
- emphasising the relevance of learning.
- addressing values that may be of more interest to learners, for example, healthy family life.

We have seen that our hard-to-reach learners experience anxiety and apprehension when entering our organisation, probably related to their previous negative experiences of school. Offering an environment that is non-threatening, welcoming and relaxed is an important engagement and retention factor. Some students make over four attempts to re-engage, before ultimately succeeding. Their willingness to come back again, and again, and again, is testament to their persistence and the reason we keep the learning door ajar.

The Australian Community College sector has a good reputation for providing this holistic environment (Gelade, Catts and Gerger. 2003.). We aim to continue to improve this reputation, particularly with trust, safety and positive, supportive relationships. We have witnessed that by building persistence in our students, the physical learning facility becomes a place of belonging. Past students and parents often become our strongest ambassadors, ably expressing the challenges they faced, the barriers they overcame and the strong feelings of acceptance resulting in increased esteem, resilience and motivation.

Balatti, Black & Falk (2006.) note that, for new adult learners, the benefits of participation in courses may not in the first instance, be reflected in course results, but in their socioeconomic wellbeing. The Albury Wodonga Community College observes this in the ‘change’ in students that, whilst improvement is made in numeracy and literacy skills, often the positive impacts on seeking further learning options, social environments, quality of life and employment, are even greater.

What we are creating is the notion of a 'community classroom' where interactions across ages, cultures, needs and wants, haves and have nots, all help our particular student cohort to 'catch up'. Their lives remain complicated and their reasons for 'dipping out' on things are varied, but connections, chats and a comfortable environment lead to demonstrable progress away from negative forces to empower each person to go forward with not just tricks to survive, but individual action steps and skill sets.

So what have we created and/or learned? The following are aspects of our mixed response that we now consider to be key components to a successful alternative school approach:

- 1 Appropriately experienced staff
- 2 Flexibility in course/content delivery
- 3 A non-institutional location, look and feel
- 4 Sensitive assessment
- 5 Recognition of prior effort
- 6 Embedding literacy
- 7 Providing tailored support services
- 8 Positive initial contact
- 9 Reducing access barriers
- 10 Providing a palette of offerings
- 11 Setting agreed rules with each student and providing multiple re-entry opportunities, often coinciding with the student's lifestyle circumstances.

There are other issues which, depending on the individual student re-engaging, can be of higher or lower order priority. What is most obviously required is a flexible approach in an environment which is not reflective of past sad educational memories, surrounded by more adult and positive, calm learners, with the opportunity to reconnect over and over again until such time that the multiple factors in a student's life align and the first positive steps towards higher education and employment begin.

In addition to the community alternative option presented here, reflection on our learnings and adaptation of what may be offered by existing teachers provides an opportunity to keep students within institutional secondary education. The following idea of a different order of teacher development is presented in an embryonic sense.

### **Elite Teaching**

This research on the Albury Wodonga Community College alternative Schools provides evidence of teacher practices, facility requirements, and policy and procedural differences which are not necessarily found in mainstream Secondary School settings. The research shows that teacher appreciation for different student preparation and delivery is necessary when working with secondary education students not in school and not employed.

There is scope to offer an elite one year course for Secondary School Teachers to better use alternative education principles and alternative vocational settings within existing institutional school systems.

Through the research, and dialogue with representatives of Independent Schools Victoria, the following broad headings for an Elite Teacher qualification at senior Secondary School level emerge:

- Alternative Education Principles
  - Improving learning outcomes for senior students from diverse and under-represented backgrounds, requires a range of theories and models of learning for educational research and practice.
  - The premise of what the end result looks like to a student learner should be based on instructional principles and elements.
- Re-engaging the disengaged student
  - Learner materials with greater importance on the understanding of the needs and expectations of students, and hence better course design, can provide alternative course work and any associated technologies to re-engage learners.
  - With ever-changing advances in learning practice for vocational, training and educational learning, technology and the lower cost of access to computer systems and internet provide rapidly changing and multiple ways for students to learn. School connection to infrequent student attendees may find new learning practices and opportunities.
- Applied learning/experiential - alternative assessment models
  - Practical examples/holistic education and international research.
  - Teaching advances and ideas in organisational learning practices in areas of vocational, training and educational circumstance that reflect the challenges of learning practices when looking at real world situations would engage different learner cohorts.

In terms of instructional design principles Elite Teachers, when applying instructional design principles, should consider that:

- there are benefits in making online, distance and face-to-face off-site education work, for infrequent attendance students.
- it is necessary to modify subject design to consider:
  - the student learner
  - objectives for the student
  - alternative methods of delivery and support
  - alternative evaluation of student study outcomes
  - methods of learning
  - sequence of the content to help the student achieve objectives
  - delivery of the instruction in one of three patterns:
    - whole group presentations
    - small group interactions
    - individualised learning
- alternative senior school learners have characteristics that set them apart from 'traditional' school learners
- alternative school students come to courses with a range of experiences, both in terms of their home life, some with work experience and, of course, their previous poor educational backgrounds. This impacts on how and why they participate in learning. While each student has individual learning needs, there are some characteristics that are common to alternative learners. They:
  - have accumulated non mainstream life experiences.

- come to school often with experiences and knowledge in diverse areas. They tend to favour practical learning activities that enable them to draw on their skills and knowledge, which helps further build confidence.
  - are not always realistic nor have insights about what is likely to work and what is not. When confident, they are readily able to relate new facts to past experiences.
  - have established opinions, values and beliefs which have been built up over time and are arrived at following their experience of families, relationships, work, community, etc.
  - are intrinsically motivated. Alternative Learners will increase their effort, when motivated by a desire to learn. They are also motivated by the relevance of the material to their own lives and learn better when material is related to their own needs and interests.
  - are individually different, thus they learn at various rates and in different ways, according to their own intellectual ability, educational level, personality and cognitive learning styles. Teaching strategies must accommodate differing comprehension rates of Alternative Learners.
  - learn best in a small, participatory and collaborative environment.
  - need to be slowly and actively involved in determining how and what they will learn.
  - are more resilient and prefer to be treated as such. Being 'lectured at', causes resentment and frustration.
  - are goal-oriented and relevancy-oriented.
  - need to know why they are learning something; they need concrete and immediate tasks or problem-centred, rather than subject-centred, learning.
  - are self-reliant learners and prefer to work at their own pace. Individuals learn best when they are ready to learn and when they have identified their own learning needs. Where a student is directed by someone else to attend a lesson, then that individual may not be ready to learn or may not see the value in participating in that course.
  - prefer problem-based learning exercises which help them build on their prior experiences, providing an opportunity for practical application of materials/theories and higher levels of motivation and self-esteem.
  - are sometimes tired, distracted, or concerned, when they attend classes. Many students are juggling classes with family issues far earlier than would otherwise be expected.
  - may have many anxieties about learning and returning to an educational environment.
  - arrive at class with a wealth of anxieties, which if not managed correctly, can impair the learning process. These anxieties may be the legacy of their prior experience of education, or as a result of an extended absence from an educational environment.
- Anxieties that might arise include:
    - fear of failure
    - fear of the new technology and the implications this has for their study, for example, use of the internet, email and producing assignments
    - concern about their ability to contribute and make intelligent/worthwhile inputs in classroom discussion
    - doubts about coping strategies - family, friends and social demands of studying
    - fear of assessment.



*Students working in the community, Wodonga 2012.*

## **2Cool4School (August – November 2012)**

Our experience with students who have withdrawn and students who did not enrol after enquiring about our program showed that even our alternative Schools left a group of young people still disconnected. As this was of significant concern our organisation made contact with a range of what we see as leading international organisations supporting similar student cohorts.



*The 2cool4school logo*

Following numerous meetings and extended site visits we have developed the first of what we see as three 'not in school' alternatives. *2Cool4School* began in mid-2012 and has, as its foundation, the following points of interest and initial success:

- 1 It is a 'not in school' program provided free of charge via an established Secondary School delivery network resourced by trained staff and teachers using a national curriculum, educational resources and support network.
- 2 The pilot commenced in late July 2012, supported by a financial contribution from our Community College.
- 3 Our target was 90 secondary education school students, 14 to 24+ years of age, commencing before June 2013.
- 4 In the first four weeks (by August 21<sup>st</sup>) 29 students had enrolled.
- 5 By the 30<sup>th</sup> November 2012, 68 students had enrolled. Of these 68:
  - a. the male to female ratio is approximately 50:50;
  - b. the age range is from 14 to greater than 24 years;
  - c. 90% are from Albury Wodonga and 10% from the surrounding regional area.
- 6 Each student has started independently and is supported by a one-on-one coach.
- 7 The 68 students have, between them, successfully completed **328 Units of Competency**, being their first positive recent educational outcome. This represents a **99% successful completion rate of all units attempted**.
- 8 Only two students have withdrawn, one to employment and the other back into the Juvenile Justice system. This student is likely to recommence *2Cool4School* on release.



One of our 2cool4school participants, Wodonga 2012.

The following table gives a snapshot of the 2Cool4School students:

<b>2Cool4School students – Characteristics</b>									
<b>Age</b>	<b>Diagnosed Disability</b>	<b>Undiagnosed Disability</b>	<b>The 'Bully'</b>	<b>Was Bullied</b>	<b>Anxiety/ Self Esteem</b>	<b>Young Mum</b>	<b>Does not like mainstream school system</b>	<b>In Juvenile system</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
14				2			1		3
15		1	4	5	2		1	1	14
16		1	4	3	1		4		13
17		1	2	1	2		7	6	19
18	1						1	1	3
19						1		1	2
20									0
21						1			1
22									0
23						1			1
24						1			1
> 24	10	1							11
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>68</b>

## Our verdict

This is a responsive and necessary pilot, realising even beyond our expectations, an educational delivery platform producing accredited qualifications for students at the greatest 'educational risk'. The positive 'pulling power' of the program for prospective learners is cannot be doubted.

We know that *2Cool4School's* success comes essentially from its novel and highly integrated design elements developed over the past two years; these include the student and home-centred delivery package, with deliberately transformative pedagogies, a fee-free status, carefully chosen resources that touch on most aspects of life, and attractive materials, as well as support which includes a one-to-one coach. This alternative includes learning applications which teach and assess literacies through accredited vocational programs in industry competencies in the absence of a relevant work context or experience, and higher education which presupposes foundation skills life experiences.

The *2Cool4School* freshness is in its alternative approach, with a deliberate emphasis on what the learner already knows and can achieve, particularly by learning how to learn at home, with coaching support. This is in stark contrast to most school and vocational education and training alternatives that tend to focus on assessment and presuppose learner deficit.

We liken our educational alternatives moving forward as like a plate of fruit with options which might be individually preferred by each person, but are all still fundamentally the same, with an agreeable taste to the person's own choosing.

We have now developed five alternative and different accredited options and one pathway (Taster Courses) alternative, to meet the wishes and readiness of potential 'at risk' students.

Each alternative 'in school' or 'out of school' package has a different delivery method:

***2Cool4School*** - Learning delivered away from school, with language of 'person' and 'friend' with mentors and no classrooms, beginning at Certificate I level and advancing to Certificate III.

***A Fair Go*** - Learning in a mix of classroom and non-classroom situations framed on the Certificate of General Education for Adults at Introduction and Certificate I levels.

***Lifeworks*** - Learning in a mix of 'not in school' situations with some activities at learning centres and a greater focus on workforce participation, across Certificates II and III levels.

**Taster courses** - To engage students worried about committing, or lost to ideas of their own potential. Often called 'soft entry', these smaller non-academic courses are proven methods to improve, without pressure, learner engagement that then leads into further education (Bowman 2007).

**Alternative School VCAL (Victoria) Model** - Part time, classroom-based hands-on Literacy, Numeracy, Vocational Education and Training Certificate Programs, Work-Related Skills and Personal Development Skills programs.

**Alternative School NSW Curriculum Model** - Full-time classroom-based years 9 to 12 mainstream curriculum without flexibility for students in years 9 and 10 who must study English, Maths, PDHPE, History, Geography and Science.

## Research Summation

The success from our efforts over 2006-2012 of initiatives is coming to fruition. The Albury Wodonga Community College now has established or planned 'in school' and 'out of school' alternatives that are offering almost a 100% success rate at re-engaging previously disengaged young people not in school and not employed.

Could it be, therefore, that the notion of every child succeeding in school is now attainable? Our experience indicates that the response is 'Yes, it is seemingly available'.

The educational fraternity's willingness, however, to respond to the current cohort of 14% to 15% of disengaged Secondary School students is still in question. Our own experience is that there is institutional resistance to offering a mix of responsive, timely and progressive alternatives, which are so important to the often isolated and poorly motivated former students.

Our Schools have demonstrably helped in meeting social, educational and individual outcomes:

- Social:
  - meeting the needs of students which are not being met by the traditional education system
  - providing opportunities to reduce individual unemployment
  - assisting in reducing the rate of youth crime
  - encompassing learning in aspects of employment, health, welfare, personal relationships, parenting and communication
  - enhancing the social, cultural and economic development of people at an individual, family and community level
- Educational:
  - offering different study levels and attendance options
  - providing free or low cost schooling
  - using welfare staff, volunteers and corporate Albury Wodonga Community College staff to provide motivation and learning support
- Individual:
  - using a strongly motivational approach to help students define their goals and make positive changes in their lives
  - offering re-engagement in learning (survival skills)
  - providing a sense of belonging to the community
  - giving students a feeling of achievement: personal rewards
  - acknowledging each student's individual needs and not treating them as 'too difficult'
  - representing an holistic approach, based on the premise that education does not occur in isolation, rather, the School seeks to enhance educational success by encouraging positive changes in learners' lives
  - providing practical skills and information to support students as they look at their work options, educational choices, health, finances, housing and relationships.



*Lead Coach Di Benson  
with a 2cool4school student,  
October 2012.*

The School offers educational, employment and community staircasing for students by:

- providing students with the valuable foundational steps to allow them to engage in formal education, learning, work or other options that may lead to their economic independence. When students are learning life skills, they feel better equipped to independently approach further learning, as well as taking greater overall responsibility for their own lives.
- enabling students to become greater contributors to, and participants, in their families and communities, by giving them the satisfaction of learning and achieving. At times, simply attempting to learn in areas they may have previously felt unable to do so facilitates a change in students' lives where they feel able to seek further learning or development goals.

For the issues faced by traditional non-learners and the barriers to traditional school learner participation, the Albury Wodonga Community College School program:

- is designed to operate within a non-threatening, non-institutional environment.
- provides a long term viable solution to reinvigorate a sense of personal success and positive change to a student's life.
- improves students' general life skills and, through better education and providing an increased confidence to seek work, advances their perceived chances for life.
- takes an holistic approach and provides staircasing options for higher education.
- delivers quality educational products and services.
- directly benefits those targeted students with few or no educational qualifications.

The Albury Wodonga Community College School program image is one that is:

ASPIRATIONAL

ACHIEVABLE

EMPOWERING

CONFIDENT

OPTIMISTIC

LEADING TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE AND A BETTER LIFE.

In summary, when any of us seeks to re-engage disengaged students we should remember:

*If learning isn't fun, why would you want to learn?*  
Rodney Wangman, Principal

## **Part 5: Research Methods, Data Capture, Literature Review**

### **Research Sampling Methodology**

#### **Sampling framework**

Focus group interviews took place during the first half of 2012 with up to four informed and consenting people, from up to five selected organisation types, in both Albury and Wodonga including:

1. Albury Wodonga Community College Schools
2. Employment network
3. Support agencies
4. Police
5. Local government

#### **Focus group interview protocols**

The interviews followed a semi-structured format, based around an exploration of the following research questions:

- 1 Tell me about the Albury Wodonga Community College and what you do in connection to students in their independent schools?
- 2 What benefits do you see that students get out of participating in the activities associated with these independent schools?
- 3 Do you see any of these benefits flow on to others, such as their families, employment and wider community? Tell me about those benefits?
- 4 What do you believe students learn through coming and participating in the independent school activities? Can you give some examples?
- 5 What advice would you give to similar organisations in order to attract, involve and benefit disengaged and unemployed 'students at risk'?

#### **Field methods**

##### ***The student and organisation 2012 survey instruments***

Students were invited to participate. They provided views from their Albury Wodonga Community College school and experiences at and knowledge of the Albury Wodonga Community College.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1 References

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# STUDENTS

## Survey of sample Students participating in AWCC Independent Schools

*Thank you for agreeing to complete this survey. It is for you to complete as a student, who participates in the Albury Wodonga Community College.*

*The aim of the survey is to find out about you and what you get from your participation (Part A, Questions 1 to 5) and also your learning needs & preferences (Part B, Questions 1 to 13).*

*Survey results will be available on request.*

You do not need to tell us your name. We will not be reporting any information that can identify you.

Please answer the questions by placing ticks ✓ in boxes or comment, where appropriate.

### Part A:

#### Questions about you, your experiences and participation in the Albury Wodonga Community College

##### 1. About your experiences in the school....

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
....I enjoy being able to participate at school when I want to				
....I enjoy the social aspect of school				
.....I feel 'at home' in our school				
....I have some say over how things happen at our school				
....I have made good friends in our school				
....I get a chance to help others				
....I enjoy the classroom activities, trips or work experience				
....I get to mix with people of different ages				

##### 2. As a result of participating in the school ...

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
... I am doing what I enjoy				
... I have a place where I feel I belong				
... I expect what I am doing in school to help me get work				
... I feel better about myself				
... I feel more a part of the community				
... I feel happier at home				
... my skills have improved				
... my wellbeing has improved				
... my confidence has improved				
... my social skills have improved				
... my organisation skills have improved				

##### 3. I regard our school as a place ...

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
... to be with other students				
... to meet new friends				
... to learn new skills				
... to help me keep healthy				

**4. About you.** Tick if any of the following apply to you

<input type="checkbox"/>	I depend on others to get to school
<input type="checkbox"/>	I come because of the childcare
<input type="checkbox"/>	I heard about the school through friends
<input type="checkbox"/>	I was referred to the school by a health or welfare worker
<input type="checkbox"/>	I was referred by my old school

**5. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements as they apply to learning in and through our school. (Tick one box in each row)**

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
Students of our school need more opportunities to learn	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our school helps me improve my skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am keen to learn more	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Difficulties with my skills make it hard for me to learn	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
This school's small size makes learning easier	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**6. If more learning opportunities were available through our school, would you be interested in taking part?**

Yes                      Maybe                      No (If No, go straight to question 7)

**If 'Yes' or 'Maybe', which type of learning would you be interested in?**  
(Tick as many as you like)

A course to get a qualification	<input type="checkbox"/>	Learning through the internet	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special interest courses	<input type="checkbox"/>	Learning in small groups	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doing more 'hands on' learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	Having some individual help	<input type="checkbox"/>
Setting up an interest club	<input type="checkbox"/>	Going on more field trips	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey.**

**Please place your survey in the envelope, seal it and return it to the person in the organisation who gave it to you, OR post it back as soon as possible.  
(The postage is pre-paid).**

## Appendix 4 Annotated Bibliography

### Associated Research: *Learning Choices: A Map for the Future*

Nation-wide research published by Kitty te Riele from the Dusseldorp Skills Forum in mid-2012 (te Riele, 2012) has currency to the Albury Wodonga Community College situation. Some key findings in reflection of our school experiences against her research are provided here:

**Structures:** *the vast majority of Learning Choices programs are relatively small, which research suggests enables successful provision. A small majority are full time and a small majority run over a full year or longer. Results from the Learning Choices National Scan show almost all programs are part of a local, state or national network. It is likely non-networked programs are under-represented in the Scan. Learning Choices programs are organised in a variety of different ways, especially in terms of their relation to conventional schooling. Cross-sectoral and interagency collaborations are considered valuable in the research reports. Funding problems are reported to be a barrier to the quality and sustainability of programs, both in program and in research reports.*

AWCC Research Report summary finding of Kitty te Riele finding:

**Small programs being different to conventional schooling, run over a year or longer, enable success.**

**Mission:** *about 60% of programs in the Learning Choices National Scan target a broad range of young people, while about 40% have a more specialised purpose. The majority of program reports demonstrate an aim to adapt their approach to meet student needs, rather than aiming to change the young person him or herself. Nevertheless, the research warns against the danger of a deficit approach in the aims or mission of a school.*

AWCC Research Report summary finding of Kitty te Riele finding:

**Adaptation to student needs must be the aim.**

**Curriculum:** *The Learning Choices National Scan shows that most programs offer accredited course options. Common aspects include practical and applied learning, individual learning plans and integrated/project approaches. The research agrees all of these are important but suggest the quality of implementation varies. The vast majority of programs offer a wide range of activities, including enabling activities, co-curricular activities and activities that connect with the local community. The research mainly comments on enabling activities, noting these are important but not sufficient.*

AWCC Research Report summary finding of Kitty te Riele finding:

**Accredited and wider ranging training options, are more successful.**

**Staffing:** *Learning Choices programs have relatively high levels of staffing with high staff-student ratios. Research provides evidence this contributes to program success, partly because it enables positive relationships between staff and students that are seen as essential. Many programs employ a variety of staff, not just teachers but also youth workers and counsellors.*

AWCC Research Report summary finding of Kitty te Riele finding:

**High ratios of a variety of staff to students, creates positive outcomes.**

*Alternative education in Australia is fragmented both as a sector of educational practice and as a field of research.*

*...Learning Choices programs offer vital pathways to enable young people to remain in school or to return to complete their education.. Retention to Year 12 has stabilised at around 75% since the mid-1990s (ABS, 2010). The secondary school drop out rate is given as 14.7% for Australia, compared to 12.9% for the OECD... (OECD, 2009). More than 16% of 15-19 year olds in*

*Australia are not fully engaged and nearly a quarter of 20 to 24 year-olds...are not in full time education or full time work (FYA, 2010, p.5; p.22). The concern grows when considering those 15-24 year olds who completed Year 10 or below: almost 57% are not fully engaged in the year after leaving school (FYA, 2010, p.21).*

*AWCC Research Report summary finding of Kitty te Riele finding:*

**All the evidence points towards too many young people not in school and not employed.**

*Early school leaving has been linked to increased likelihood of unemployment, underemployment, crime and ill-health (AIG and DSF, 2007; BCA, 2003; FYA, 2010).*

*AWCC Research Report summary finding of Kitty te Riele finding:*

**All the evidence shows 'students at risk' fall behind, becoming a welfare burden, not a productive contributor for self, family or community.**

*Knowledge about the contribution Learning Choices programs make to engaging young people with education and helping them attain credentials is imperative.*

*Terms used in reports by and about programs include alternative education, second chance education, re-engagement programs, flexi schools or flexible learning options, community-based programs, and non-traditional or unconventional programs. A criticism of some of these terms is that they can be seen to reinforce the status of such programs as on the margin of the education system. Dusseldorp Skills Forum therefore uses 'Learning Choices' as a more positive term.*

*Learning Choices programs are often characterised by a shared philosophy of providing enfranchising socially inclusive educational pathways for young people who, for complex reasons, are outside conventional education. Similarly, many different terms are used, for the young people served by such programs: disengaged, vulnerable, alienated, disadvantaged, and 'at risk' youth.*

*A critique of some of these terms is that they can be seen to blame the young people themselves for their lack of success in conventional schools. Alternative suggested terms are disenfranchised or marginalised youth (Te Riele, 2006a). This report uses 'disenfranchised' to indicate that the causes for young people's difficulty in conventional schooling largely lie outside of them – disenfranchisement is done to them by factors within schooling and society more broadly, rather than by themselves.*

*The overwhelming majority of non-academic outcomes mentioned in the program reports relate to social and emotional wellbeing, especially improved confidence and self esteem. Some 'stand alone' and 'integrated' Learning Choices programs are mostly aimed at improving wellbeing. The evaluation for one such 'integrated', short-term program found that 100% of the graduates agreed the program had increased their confidence. For some programs and some students, this wellbeing went a step further, including addressing mental health difficulties.*

*AWCC Research Report summary finding of Kitty te Riele finding:*

**Holistic education that motivates, inspires, as well as informs and educates, is rewarding.**

*Estimating the number of Learning Choices programs and students is not straightforward. Overall, the responses to the Learning Choices National Scan add up to 61,000 young people in over 400 programs in almost 2000 locations nationally. However, two specific contributions to the Learning Choices National Scan require further consideration: Adult and Community Education (ACE) in Victoria with 10000 students in 320 locations and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) with 19175 students in 430 locations.*

*Without a doubt these both offer choices for learning to young people: ACE (as well as TAFE across Australia) gives young people the option of studying for vocational certificates, traineeships and apprenticeships within a more adult, post-school environment. VCAL (as well*

as senior secondary VET in School (VETiS) pathways in other states and territories) offer an alternative to the traditional academic Year 11 and 12 curriculum.

VCAL and VETiS demonstrate how school systems have responded to the dramatic rise in retention to Year 12 during the 1990s and the resulting broadened student population, by offering more inclusive curricular approaches. Both ACE/TAFE and VCAL/VETiS enable many young people to remain in education by offering vocational learning options that lead to credentials that are in many (although not all) ways equivalent to more traditional Year 12 qualifications. The remarkable success of ACE/TAFE and VCAL/VETiS is worth noting.

In addition, another 4100 young people were on waiting lists to enrol in programs (see Holdsworth, 2011). This data highlights that Learning Choices programs cater for large numbers of young people and play an important role in educational provision in Australia.

AWCC Research Report summary finding of Kitty te Riele finding:

**There are many small, localised school based programs responding in an uncoordinated way, inside an institutionalised school/TAFE system.**

The subheadings below group the types of outcomes that were most commonly reported by programs: attendance, academic achievement, destinations, non-academic achievement and stakeholder satisfaction.

The first three of these (attendance, academic achievement, destinations) are of particular relevance to the national policy agenda around raising educational attainment. The latter two cover 'softer' and less tangible outcomes that are highly valued by students and provide indications of wellbeing and engagement.

AWCC Research Report summary finding of Kitty te Riele finding:

**The methods of measurement for student success 'outside' the majority institutionalised system are (and must be) different, if we are to re-engage lost students.**

Reported attendance rates vary from 40% to over 90%. Several Learning Choices programs note that their students have a chequered attendance history.

AWCC Research Report summary finding of Kitty te Riele finding:

**Not in school education alternatives, are necessary.**

A small number of programs include Year 9 level education. Many Learning Choices programs engage in art and sports activities.

For programs that offer no or only low level credentials, a common destination is to other Learning Choices programs, educational transition programs, or pre-employment programs. In other words, the Learning Choices programs can act as a pathway back into a relatively conventional educational options.

AWCC Research Report summary finding of Kitty te Riele finding:

**A program with a guaranteed qualification, getting people into work.**

Out of the 400 programs that entered details for the number of students, almost three hundred were relatively small - under 50 students. Of those, 165 programs (or 40% of all entries) had fewer than 20 students enrolled at the commencement of a program.

In the Learning Choices National Scan, 58% of programs are full time or close to full time. Some programs that run for four days per week are considered full time. On the other hand, about 23% of programs run for one day per week or less. About 60% of programs run over a full year or longer.

AWCC Research Report summary finding of Kitty te Riele finding:

**Our historic thinking of school attendance has to be different to engage 'at risk'**

**students. No longer is learning delivered in a school classroom, as necessary for independent teenagers.**

*Two resources have been developed as part of the ICAN approach in South Australia. First, to enable programs to provide literacy and numeracy support that is appropriate to students' needs, ICAN has worked with the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) "to develop an engaging new online literacy and numeracy assessment tool called 'Compass'" (ICAN, 2010).*

*The Learning Choices National Scan shows that the most common activities (offered by about 80% of programs) are life skills and literacy and numeracy. Also very common (about 60%) are computer/IT skills, mentoring, and job-seeking.*

*In addition, the program reports highlight three types of curricular activities that are commonly offered:*

- Enabling activities (necessary to help young people complete credentialed learning): in particular, almost all Learning Choices programs emphasise literacy and numeracy as core basic learning for their students, and many also see mentoring and pastoral care activities as necessary for supporting students.*
- Co-curricular activities (offered for their inherent value in addition to any credentialed learning): popular co-curricular activities include cultural activities (such as Indigenous Dance and Art), driving instruction, and outdoor adventure and camps.*
- Activities that make explicit connections with the local community: through service learning, with teams of young people working on projects for the community, and through sport.*

*ICAN (2010) explicitly states that it is essential that student learning in Flexible Learning Options programs is accredited. Both Lamb and Rice (2008) and De Jong and Griffiths (2006) suggest a broad range of accredited curriculum is needed, catering for diverse interests and strengths and enabling choice. The challenge for Learning Choices programs, according to Connor (2006, p.30) is "making learning attractive, while ensuring that students emerge with valued credentials".*

*Several reports indicate students appreciated applied and 'hands on' learning that provided relevant skills (Connor, 2006; Myconos, 2011; Mills and McGregor, 2010; Zyngier and Gale, 2003).*

*Offering VET options is also linked to improved student outcomes and school completion (Lamb and Rice, 2008).*

*The research evidence suggests that individual learning plans are a worthwhile strategy, as long as they are implemented well.*

*Similarly, there is also general consensus that pastoral care is a necessary foundation for many students.*

*Lamb and Rice provide evidence of the positive impact of smaller class sizes on school completion, especially for students from lower SES backgrounds and students who are 'at risk'.*

*High staff-student ratios support more positive staff/student relationships (Connor, 2006; Mills and McGregor, 2010).*

*De Jong and Griffiths (2006, p.35) argue that "relationship-building is an essential aspect of effective AEPs" (Alternative Education Programs).*

*This also applies to catering for disengaged students in conventional schools (Lamb and Rice, 2010) and in vocational education and training (Hargreaves, 2011).*

*Such positive relationships require mutual respect and trust (Connor, 2006; Lamb and Rice,*

2010) as well as a genuine interest in the student and reducing the emphasis on teachers' power and authority (De Jong and Griffiths, 2006; Wyn et al, 2004).

The struggle of "finding, holding and supporting 'the right staff'". This includes not only teachers, but also social workers, counsellors, and health professionals (Connor, 2006; Myconos, 2011), especially in the context of the extended service provision in many Learning Choices programs (see Black et al, 2010).

Primary teaching practices can also be helpful for secondary teachers to learn about (Connor, 2006).

Professional development and support is also needed to help staff cope with the high workload, although Myconos (2011) warns this may not be enough to prevent burn out.

*AWCC Research Report summary finding of Kitty te Riele finding:*

**Common activities (offered by about 80% of programs), are life skills and literacy and numeracy. Also common (about 60%) are computer/IT skills, mentoring, and job-seeking.**

**There is consensus that pastoral care is a necessary foundation for many students. Evidence exists of the positive impact of smaller class sizes on school completion.**

## **Appendix 5 Associated AWCC Programs and Research**

The following Associated Programs and Research have had an impact in the support, links to work participation, teacher development and philosophical reinforcement of the *Village of Learning* model.

Whilst each Associated Program or Research has come from a different starting point, the practices applied and information gained have assisted in the application of our curriculum development and reinforcement of a wider and more holistic approach to disengaged students.

### **Associated AWCC Program - The Aged Concern Project, 2011**

This AWCC project was aimed at re-engaging young people into a year 9/10 alternative program, which was conducted at an offsite venue (Youth Emergency Services Agency, Albury). The reasoning was that these students were severe school refusers - they would not attend any location that had any resemblance to a 'school'. These students were referred by Youth and Family Services (YFS), which provided a youth worker to support this cohort of students.

As strong believers in the principles of adult learning, we placed this group of ten students in an Aged Concern Building, where their classroom was surrounded by:

- Childcare/playgroup
- Learners with Disabilities
- Indigenous learners
- Older learners (over 50s).

There was also a common room, a communal kitchen and a large adjacent car park.

Our students were in the minority. Being surrounded by the other adult students served as an informal means of regulating students' behaviour and use of language, whilst anecdotally improving their social skills.

This was a microcosm of our Wodonga *Village of Learning* environment.

### **Associated AWCC Program - The Wodonga Recycle Centre Project 2011 - 2012**

Similar to the above, the AWCC *Wodonga Recycle Centre Project* involved groups of our VCAL students volunteering their time at the Wodonga Recycle Centre. Here they worked alongside people with disabilities, who taught our students how to break down electronic equipment into its components, for recycling. Again, a learning environment was created where students:

- were in the minority, surrounded by adult volunteers,
- were helping people with disabilities learn leadership and communication skills.

Students learnt that people more disadvantaged than themselves, could be effective contributors to our society and their negative perceptions, prejudices and biases were broken down or reduced.

This project was further extended in 2012, to include the opportunity for students to repair recycled goods for resale, with the proceeds being donated to charity.

## **Associated Research – Albury City Council 2012 - 2016 Social Plan**

A survey of 402 young people undertaken by Gateway Community Health based on the National Survey of Young Australians 2008: likely and emerging issues, revealed the following issues of concern for young people:

- Drugs - 31.6%
- Suicide - 27.4%
- Physical/sexual abuse - 26.5%
- Body image - 24.8%
- Family conflict - 24.4%

Areas young people turn to for advice and/or support, include:

- Friends - 85.5%
- Parents - 69.9%
- Relative/Friend - 53.3%
- Internet - 18.8%
- School councillor - 14.5%

Consultation data revealed:

- perceived high levels of youth unemployment and access to alternative education programs.
- the need for Albury City to work in partnership with schools, businesses, community and parents to create employment pathways for young people.
- many teachers at local schools did not have an awareness of the local youth programs in Albury and Wodonga.

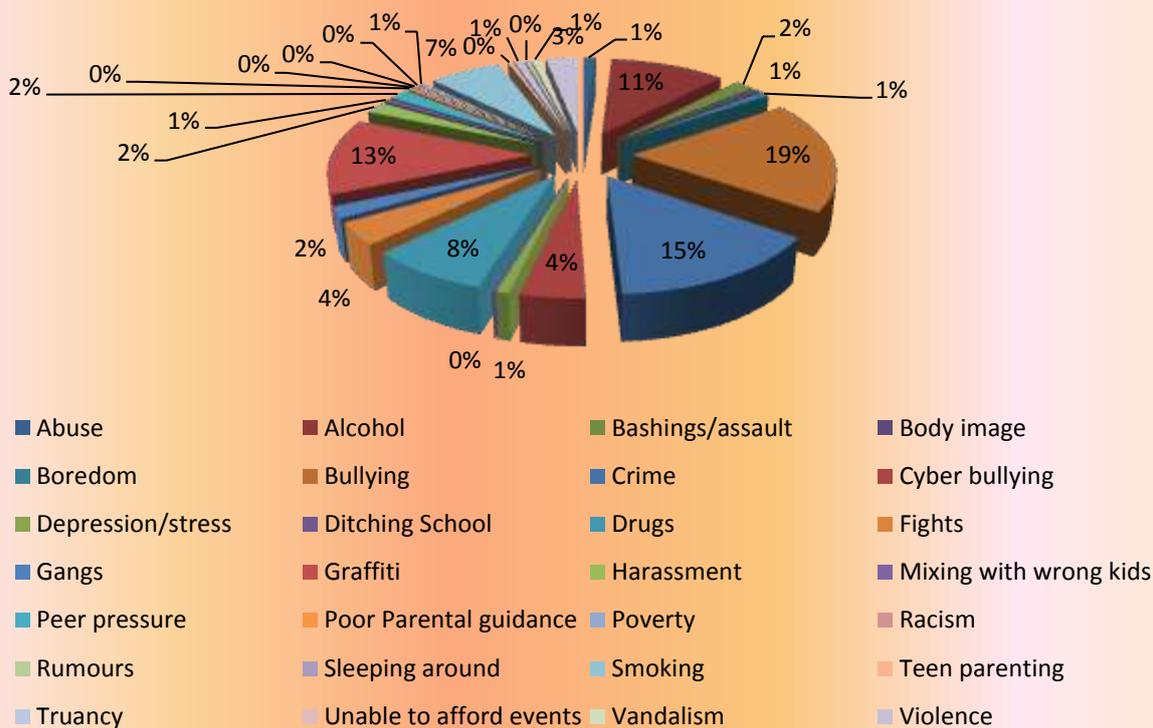
The number of young people in Albury across the age range 15-19 years was 3,578, and age range 10-14 years was 3,422.

Teen pregnancy from the Victoria Department of Human Services (DHS) shows births to mothers under 20 years of age are higher in rural areas than metropolitan areas. In the Hume region, approximately 5.2% of all births (2002) were to mothers under 20 years of age, two to three times higher than the rate in some metropolitan areas; this rose to 6.4%. The 2005-06 data shows births to women under 25 years were 25.8% of all births.

## **Associated Research – Albury City Council and Murray Industry and Community Education Partnership (2011)**

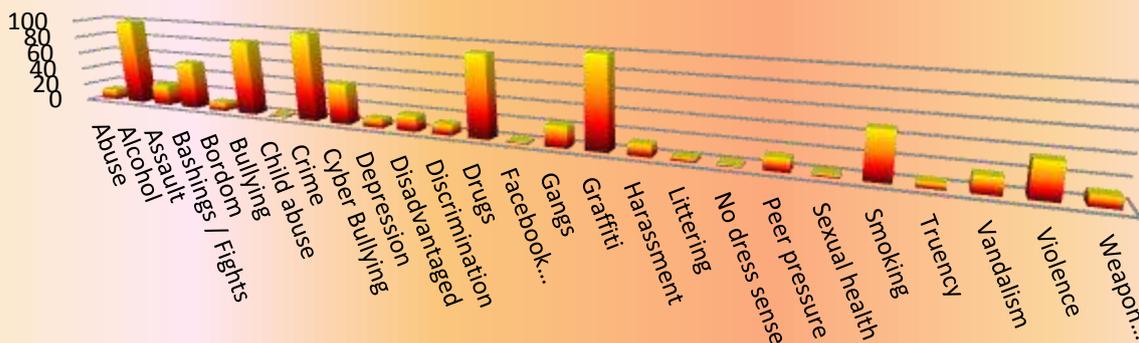
Information provided in the following graphs from the Albury City Council from another youth survey it conducted with Murray Industry and Community Education Partnership in early 2011 show the issues impacting on Albury Secondary Schools years 9, 10 and 11 students.

**Youth Survey Year 9**  
**What are the main issues occurring for young people in Albury?**



*Main issues for young people in Albury – Year 9*

**Youth Survey Year 10**  
**What are the main issues occurring for young people in Albury?**



*Main issues for young people in Albury – Year 10*

## Year 11 - What are the main issues occurring for young people in Albury?



*Main issues for young people in Albury – Year 10*

While the source data presented in the above graphs is not available for deeper analysis, it accurately reflects issues, wants and needs of the students in the Albury Wodonga Community College Schools. Issues of relationships, motivation and self-esteem, disadvantage or social disability, behavioural response, communication and education/employment pitfalls are similarly apparent with differing levels, in the AWCC students.

### **Associated Program – NCVET Research (2010)**

NCVER (National Centre for Vocational Education Research) – Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), in their 2010 Australian Vocational Education and Training Statistics, estimated that 78.8% of 15 to 19 year olds, participated in education and training as at August 2010. While the breakup of this figure is below, it leaves the question, what were the other 21.2% doing?

- 52.7% were in school
- 13.8% were enrolled in higher education
- 4.7% were in trade apprenticeships or traineeships
- 1.8% in non-trade apprenticeships
- 5.8% were enrolled in publicly funded VET programs.

## Appendix 6 Community Sentinel Responses

Provided below is a sample of the feedback from our Community Sentinels on our School against the following questions:

1. *How do you think we are different from mainstream schools?*
2. *Why do you think what we do works?*
3. *Any other comments you would like to make?*

1. *Being able to offer an alternative with smaller class sizes and personalised attention, certainly stands out as a major feature.*
2. *As an alternative option, AWCC taps into a specific areas of education and creates success with specialised teaching staff and dedicated facilities.*
3. *AWCC is a critical link in the education network in Albury Wodonga, which enhances the profile available for the community to access.*

**Leo Whyte**  
**Future Students Adviser**  
**National Recruitment | Future Student Centre | La Trobe University**  
**February 2012**

1. *Smaller class sizes, more access to welfare assistance, swifter action on bullying, less confrontational teaching styles, childcare on site.*
2. *Because the classes are smaller, students can get help more quickly without getting frustrated and disruptive. Less confrontational teaching is possible because attendance is not compulsory, so students can leave or not turn up if they are having a bad day (– this can also be a bad thing because students with low motivation, are less likely to attend.) Students feel they are treated more as adults because they can smoke, and leave the school at lunchtimes, so there is less incentive to challenge authority. The teachers or Greg [Welfare Office] are more likely to notice potential problems, because they know all students in the school, therefore action can be taken before a big problem occurs.*
3. *Many of our students come here because of bullying in bigger schools, so our swift action on bullying is very important to their continued attendance and feelings of safety.*

*New mums do not feel out of place here, because there are others in the same situation.*

**Teresa Ellison**  
**AWCC Teacher**  
**February 2012**

1. *Albury Wodonga Community College differs from mainstream schools in that it works solely with disengaged youth. It operates on adult learning principles which leads to other differences, no uniforms, attendance is not compulsory and teachers on first name terms with students, etc. As the clients often live out of home, the College does not have a parent cohort to rely on for support of the young people in their community.*

*Albury Wodonga Community College differs from mainstream schools in that it only offers VCAL and VET offerings, (no VCE???) and operates with students from the post compulsory cohort.*

*Other differences are that classes are small and potential is there to address individual student needs and interests.*

2. *I think what you do works because the staff are motivated and focused on the needs of the students. Offering VCAL allows for students to re-engage with formal learning and develop pathways to further education, training and employment. The link between VCAL and the VET provision of the College is important and helps with student engagement.*
3. *Through undertaking the benchmarking process last year, I think there is scope for a College career development plan and program to be developed and resourced appropriately. Career development can enhance the existing work of the College through helping build student aspiration and motivation. Career Action Plans would help students articulate their goals, reflect on these and plan their pathways. Career development initiatives will support retention, increase engagement and improve outcomes for all students at Albury Wodonga Community College. Career programs and services can support existing work to enhance the opportunities for all students to choose the most appropriate individual pathway.*

**Mary Harrington**  
**Regional Career Development Officer**  
**Department of Education and Early Childhood Development**  
**Hume Region**  
**February 2012**

1. *Taking in both the Kiewa St Campus and activity held at Age Concern last year, the look and feel is quite different to your mainstream school. The factory environment and Adult learning centre both provided quite different settings. One reflecting something completely different to what a school looks like. Both had many positives, other role models, technological equipment was available with possible opportunities for students to support the older people and vice versa and some negatives.*
2. *Programs are quite different, students appear to be treated as adults and sessions I experienced had a relaxed atmosphere, whereby communication flowed quite well. Additional support in the classroom with people that the students could relate to and with, worked well, this was observed at Aged Concern.*
3. *Students I came across in late 2011, I was very impressed with.*

**Phil Thorneycroft**  
**Inspiring Learning Partnerships**  
**February 2012**

1. *Very supportive in enrolling and engaging at risk young people, in particular Greg Barmby [Welfare Officer] who has been fantastic. Understanding of needs and barriers in this cohort of young people, flexibility and supportive environment.*
2. *Flexibility in program, supportive teachers, hands on and practical work, students not required to attend Mon to Fri 9-3pm, students are still able to complete debutant ball.*
3. *AWCC is a very important independent school that is needed in Albury Wodonga, without this program a lot of young people would not be engaged in education.*

**Alison Holloway**  
**Acting Youth and Community Program Manager**  
**Youthways**  
**February 2012**

1. *I believe we are different because of the open educational environment that is provided to our students with its strong emphasis on acceptance, appreciation of individualism and different characteristics of our Australian teenage student population.*
2. *However, I also believe students who come to our school have enrolled because they feel disadvantaged in some way at their previous school, but we add to that 'disadvantaged experience' by not providing the quality teaching resources they deserve. For example, the provision of a new television set so that students can complete lessons using modern visual mediums or sets of class texts, Library, DVDs and Videos.*

**John Noonan**  
**AWCC Teacher**  
**February 2012**

1. *We are different from main stream school because of:*
  - *Our small class/school size*
  - *We do as we say in relation to bullying*
  - *We care*
  - *We are approachable*
  - *We treat students as adults*
  - *We treat students the way we would like to be treated*
2. *It works because:*
  - *We are consistent*

- *We follow up if they are away*
- *We show interest in their lives*
- *We are non-judgmental.*

**Natasha Hillier**  
**AWCC Teacher**  
**February 2012**

1. *The offering is more holistic than just 'education in the traditional sense'. Students are provided with not just a school curriculum, but a level of care and support that is far greater than one would normally see (or is needed) in a standard school environment.*

*The students who attend the AWCC school bring each day the life pressures not normally associated with a school student. The school offers not just an education but a chance for many of the students to reconnect with the community and support agencies.*

2. *The size/location/layout of the school is important, as it helps provide a non-threatening environment for the students to connect to.*

*The level of additional support offered by the teachers and the College is fundamental, in the school working for the students.*

*Looks at the longer term outcomes and builds in flexibility, to allow those longer term goals to be reached.*

3. *Without the school we would see more of our young people in the community dis-engaged and disconnected from support and education. If we are really serious about breaking intergenerational 'welfare' outcomes and we want to make real change for youth, this school must not only be encouraged but also supported. The AWCC changes lives and enhances our community.*

**Anna Speedie**  
**Councillor**  
**City of Wodonga**  
**April 2012**

1. *The school makes a real effort to work with students other schools are sometimes reluctant to accept as students.*

*The students look different; they are allowed to dress casually and have much more freedom to make decisions about engaging with education.*

*There is more support for students with difficulties from a welfare point of view and generally an acceptance that these students have and will have very different perspectives from our most mainstream students.*

*The community setting is a big advantage in Wodonga.*

2. *Flexibility in delivery.*

*Acceptance of who the students are, even with the difficulties that this creates.*

*Students learn to trust at least one person in the school but generally engage with the fact that the school appears different.*

*Allow the student to grow into the school, rather than making judgements about them and their potential.*

*Generally know the students well.*

3. *I believe that there is still work to be done. Unfortunately the staff come from a conservative middle class background and to be really different, we must find different solutions. It is too easy to slip back into our comfort zones and do what we have always done, without really exploring what it means to be different as teams/teachers and educational leaders.*

*This is a comment from inside the organisation. Our one main difference is acceptance of different kids and some understanding of their different needs. We haven't yet built a strong professional learning community that really explores all the options that will work best for these students, as we are generally trained in mainstream institutions. I would certainly suggest, now that I am doing my Cert IV TAE, that this training lacks significant educational understanding and rigour and certainly lacks understanding of how students learn.*

*Staff, as a professional learning community, have to get better at setting new standards for these types of students and lead by example, to build excellence in systems, educational expertise and understanding, welfare support and processes and facilitation of learning that is broadbased, innovative and flexible enough to be differentiated for each student. We may develop good relationships with students but that only works to improve results for students who are willing. We have a lot to do in engaging and educating and supporting the less willing learners and not be seen as the place to be, to get their Centrelink payments.*

**Margaret Crisp**  
**Education Officer and former CEO of NELLEN**  
**April 2012**

## Appendix 7 Glossary

ABS	<i>Australian Bureau of Statistics</i>
ACARA	<i>Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority</i>
ACE	<i>Adult and Community Education</i>
ACER	<i>Australian Council for Educational Research</i>
AEP	<i>Alternative Education Programs</i>
AIG	<i>Australian Industry Group</i>
ANTA	<i>Australian National Training Authority</i>
AWCC	<i>Albury Wodonga Community College</i>
BCA	<i>Business Council of Australia</i>
CEO	<i>Chief Executive Officer</i>
CGEA	<i>Certificates in General Education for Adults</i>
COAG	<i>Council of Australian Governments</i>
DEEWR	<i>Department of Education and Workplace Relations</i>
DHS	<i>Department of Human Services (Victoria)</i>
DSF	<i>Dusseldorp Skills Forum</i>
FYA	<i>Foundation for Young Australians</i>
HS	<i>High School</i>
ICAN	<i>Innovation Community Action Networks</i>
ISVic	<i>Independent Schools Victoria</i>
MIPs	<i>Managed Individual Pathways</i>
NCVER	<i>National Centre for Vocational Education Research</i>
NELLEN	<i>North East Local Learning and Employment Network</i>
NSW	<i>New South Wales</i>
OECD	<i>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</i>
PDHPE	<i>Personal Development, Health and Physical Education</i>
RTO	<i>Registered Training Organisation</i>
SC	<i>Secondary College</i>
SCH	<i>Student Contact Hours</i>
SES	<i>Socio Economic Status</i>
TAFE	<i>Technical and Further Education</i>
VCAA	<i>Victorian Certification and Assessment Authority</i>
VCAL	<i>Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning</i>
VET	<i>Vocational Education and Training</i>
VETiS	<i>Vocational Education and Training in Schools</i>
VRQA	<i>Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority</i>
YFS	<i>Youth and Family Services</i>