

Reaching New Heights in Community Learning

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Co-pilots is a community mentoring program that was conceived out a real need to support the number of young people who were not connecting with mainstream education. The program was developed in 1999 through a partnership agreement between state and local government, specifically the Tasmanian Government's Esk Education District and the Launceston City Council. In consultation with around 15 human service agencies and young people, a framework was developed for a mentoring program. The program addresses issues that were identified as contributing strongly to students disengaging from education such as relevance to the real world, addressing different learning styles and interests, experiencing success, the existence of a significant adult and, connecting to the community.

The program consists of recruiting and training volunteer mentors from the community who are then matched with students referred from schools. The student and mentor work on a community based project developed from their mutual interests, for a minimum of two hours per week for eight weeks. At the end of this time, a celebration event is held where the student and mentor present their project to friends, family, educators, members of the community and representatives of local businesses.

The primary aims of the Program are to:

- (a) Develop skills, confidence and self-esteem
- (b) Find new pathways to learning and work

Through extensive evaluations at the end of each program, it has been found that as well as addressing the aims of the program the concerns raised by young people are also being addressed. The evaluation has also revealed many flow-on benefits for the Launceston community as a whole, including:

- Continuing involvement in related projects. For example, in a project called NETCONNECT (A Tasmanian Regional Arts funded project) two 2002 Co-Pilots students were able to work with an editor and film the 2003 Celebration Evening. This has been produced as a video documentary which will be presented during youth week in 2004, be part of a tour and made available on the internet. The film will also be used as a promotional tool for the program. The Celebration Evening where projects are presented demonstrates the pride and feeling of value that is experienced by both mentor and students in their achievement.
- Developing community capacity. Adult mentors receive quality training on youth issues and befriending and have the opportunity to support a young person through an important developmental experience. The personal and professional benefits have been wide-ranging and include improved relations at home and at work. Several mentors have gained employment using participation in the Co-Pilots program as a reference and TAFE and Launceston College have allowed their students credit in their courses for

completion of the Co-Pilots program. Participation in the program has given mentors great personal fulfilment and for some has provided the impetus to engage in further studies and develop new career paths.

- Educators have improved relations with their students and have noticed marked behavioural improvement and attitude. Co-Pilots offers educators a democratic tool for behaviour management. In the evaluation results from 2001, 2002 & 2003, 70% of students involved in the Co-Pilots program were reported to have increased confidence and self-esteem and improved their attitude towards school over the course of the program. Teachers reported the changes directly attributable to the program.
- The community of Launceston has the opportunity to invest in its young people in a public and practical way and through this better appreciate their issues, abilities and potential. This interaction between local businesses, community and young people develops a sense of connectedness and responsibility and gives the young person a place of value and usefulness in the community.
- Human services, from all sectors, have the opportunity to work in partnership on a rewarding project that offers benefit to their respective client group. Human Service agencies such as Anglicare and agencies such as Centrelink are encouraging their staff to participate in Co-pilots to increase their skills in their current roles. It is also seen as potential early intervention.
- The local business community has become involved and sponsored several projects. The networking skills that are developed become vitally important in seeking future employment.

Co-Pilots was successfully piloted in 2001 with five out of seven 12-16 year old high school students and their mentors. The program in 2002 included 16 learning partnerships with 11 presenting projects at the celebration event and in 2003 12 out of 13 learning partnerships completed. This represents a 70% completion rate for 2001 and 2002 and a 91% completion rate for 2003. In 2003, two licensing-out programs were piloted. Individual schools took responsibility for the implementation of the program with some training and support from the central coordinator. Licensing-out allows greater flexibility for the school, enables them to tailor the program to the specific needs of their students and allows a greater number of students to participate in the program.

At the end of 2003, funding was received from the Department of Premier and Cabinet for three years to support the continued growth of the program. For the first time, the program will be offered to primary schools with the aim of early intervention. In 2004 a partial licensing-out of the program has been offered to 10 primary and high schools. Also participating in licensed out programs are four high Schools and one primary school throughout the state.

Due to the consequent increased demand for mentors, several organisations have been approached to allow employees to train and participate in Co-Pilots in work time. In return, organisations have been offered the training free of

charge which has many potential benefits for the organisation. The Launceston City Council and Hydro Tasmania have so far agreed to support this proposition.

The program is now available as a discrete package comprising the Comment training manual and a Resource Manual for operating the program. Comment represents the personal development component of the training and is facilitated by experienced trainers. It is a generic program that can be adapted by other mentoring programs and is currently being utilised by White Lion. It covers issues such as communication skills, ethics and confidentiality, conflict management, and self care. All training resources are provided on an accompanying CD-ROM. An additional six hours training is also completed and covers issues specific to the target group. For example, in the Co-pilots program issues covered are Youth Justice, Child Protection, Drugs and Alcohol Usage and Suicide Prevention. The Co-Pilots Resource Manual provides all information and proformas in hard copy and on CD-ROM to enable organisations to fully implement the program. There will be a Train the Trainer session in November 2004 for anyone interested in adopting the program in their region.

The hard work and vision of those who have been involved from the inception of the program to its current form were recently recognised by the receipt of the Local Government Association of Tasmania's Award for Excellence in the category of Community Development and the overall Local Government Association of Tasmania's Gold Award for the state. The program has also been shortlisted for the National Local Government Awards, with finalists notified in mid-september. Any enquiries can be directed to the Co-Pilots Coordinator ph. (03) 6323 3368.

Louise McGowan
Co-Pilots Coordinator

Biography

Some so not relevant so just leave it out - but all adds to life experience I guess!!

Zoologist – 1990 - 1997 Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery
Singer in childrens group The Mudpies – 1997 – 2001
LAP Tutor 2001
ATAS Tutor 2001
Mentor in Co-Pilots Pilot Program 2001
Co-ordinator of Co-Pilots Program (p/t) & Teacher aide for Autistic child 2002 (p/t)
Co-ordinator of Co-Pilots Program (.8) 2003 -2004
And my most challenging role ever:
Mother of two lively boys aged 8 & 11.