

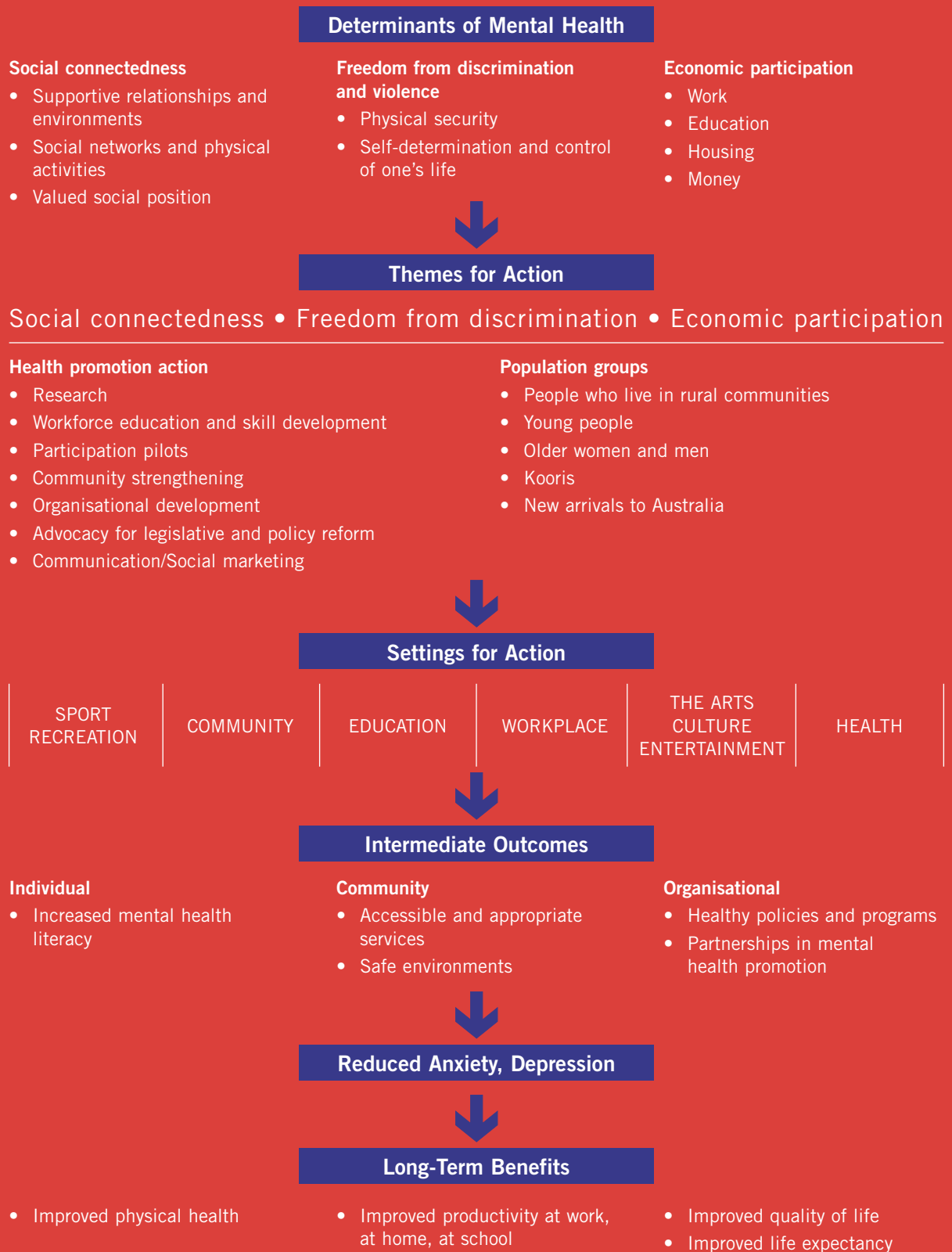
Promoting Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing through Participation in Economic Activities

Key Learnings and Promising Practices

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation
Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002



Mental Health Promotion Framework



Promoting Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing through Participation in Economic Activities

Key Learnings and Promising Practices

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Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002

“It’s not just having this job, but everything else that comes from it. Like I work and get a pay packet, but that’s not even close to what I get out of it.”

Jane

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The publication is also available at <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au>

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Foreword

In acknowledgement of the social and economic costs associated with the escalating incidence of mental ill-health, the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) in 1998 identified the promotion of mental health and wellbeing as a key area for action.

VicHealth focuses on the social and economic determinants of mental health and in so doing we highlight three determinants and their link to mental health and wellbeing: social connectedness, valuing diversity and economic participation. We also identify a number of population groups which emerge as experiencing greatest disadvantage with regard to these determinants and subsequent burden of disease in our community.

The links between economic activity and health are nowhere more clear than in the situation of some young people. Trends towards fractured social cohesion and economic restructuring place young people in a most vulnerable position with regard to health outcomes.

An example of the impact of these trends can be seen in the changes in economic conditions and social trends which have resulted in major changes in the world of work, education and training. Current circumstances are very different from those of previous generations.

The effect of this on the community is that we are perhaps less cognisant of the particular needs and stresses experienced by young people today. Furthermore, we may need to find more innovative and appropriate strategies with which to create and expand opportunities for young people.

This is the challenge implicit in our Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002 and in the development of the Youth Economic Participation for Mental Health and Wellbeing Scheme. Reflected in this Scheme are a remarkable collection of individuals within challenging and exciting communities: the individual young people who have always tried hard and sometimes achieved great outcomes; the project officers and staff who have an enthusiasm, skill and heart which makes their contribution meaningful and inspiring; and the local communities which have proven that it is possible to integrate young people, give them a real role to play and in turn improve everyone's mental health and wellbeing.

Young people who are supported, respected and valued will do better at school, in work, with friends and have better mental health and wellbeing. We have a responsibility to ensure that today's young people, who are our future employers, parents, artists, athletes, politicians and community leaders, receive this opportunity to develop to their full potential.

Rob Moodie
CEO VicHealth

INTRODUCTION

1



Introduction

In 1999, the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) developed its Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002, establishing a framework for the development of research and program activity over a three-year period.

Through review of available research and literature it was evident that young people face significant social, cultural and economic challenges which have the potential to impact negatively on their mental health and wellbeing. Consequently, they were identified as one of five population groups to be included for focus in the Plan.

This publication draws on the evaluation and experience of five projects funded by VicHealth as part of the implementation of the Mental Health Promotion Plan. The projects worked individually and together for 15 months to address issues of young people's economic participation and its contribution to mental health and wellbeing. The five projects were:

- Artspace: Coorangamite Youth Enterprise Project: Terang Youth Resources
- Kulcha Shift: Brophy Family and Youth Services Warrnambool
- Changing Lanes: Nagle College, Bairnsdale
- Whitelion Juvenile Justice Employment Project: Whitelion Inc.
- Yarram Young People's Enterprise Project: Yarram and District Health Service

This report documents the outcomes of these projects and the key lessons learned. It is one of a series of reports of VicHealth-funded mental health promotion activity that:

- contribute to knowledge about the processes of promoting mental health and wellbeing;
- assist VicHealth and its community, government and business sector partners in future planning of mental health promotion activity in Victoria;
- provide information to assist VicHealth in the further development and implementation of mental health promotion activity; and
- support ongoing development of mental health promotion projects at the field level.

Other publications in this series focus on VicHealth-funded mental health promotion activities concerned with rural and Indigenous communities, people who are newly arrived to Australia and participation in community arts.

An additional scheme of projects, targeted to rural communities, focuses on same sex attracted young people. This scheme has been separately evaluated, with the report being available on the VicHealth website at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au.

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
FOR PLANNING AND
IMPLEMENTING INNOVATIONS
TO PROMOTE MENTAL HEALTH
AND WELLBEING

2



A Conceptual Framework for Planning and Implementing Innovations to Promote Mental Health and Wellbeing

As part of the Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002, VicHealth developed a conceptual framework to guide planning and implementation. This framework identifies strategies and processes to address key determinants of mental health. It also outlines specific outcomes to guide the evaluation both of the Plan itself and funded programs. The framework, discussed in greater detail below, is summarised in figure 1 (see inside front cover).

Defining mental health

Mental health is defined in the Plan as ‘the embodiment of social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Mental health provides individuals with the vitality necessary for active living, to achieve goals and to interact with one another in ways that are respectful and just’.

Mental health promotion: VicHealth’s approach

The approach to mental health promotion adopted in the Plan is one which aims to achieve better mental health and wellbeing across populations by:

- focusing on improving the social, physical and economic environments that determine the mental health of populations and individuals;
- focusing on enhancing protective factors such as coping capacity, resilience and connectedness of individuals and communities in order to improve emotional and social wellbeing;
- taking a whole-of-population approach, although different interventions may focus on specific population groups; and
- measuring outcomes in terms of public policy, organisational practices and organisation of social factors and health literacy (DHAC 1999).

Determinants of mental health and priority themes for action

A range of factors influence a person's mental health and wellbeing, among them individual attributes such as heredity, luck, knowledge, attitude and skills. However, there is a growing body of evidence demonstrating that social, economic and environmental conditions also play an important role.

In particular, VicHealth identified the following three determinants as the priority themes for its Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002:

Social connectedness, including:

- social and community connectedness
- stable and supportive environments
- a variety of social and physical activities
- access to networks and supportive relationships
- a valued social position

Freedom from discrimination and violence, including:

- physical security
- opportunity for self-determination and control of one's life

Economic participation, including:

- access to work and meaningful engagement
- access to education
- access to adequate housing
- access to money

Social connectedness

Social connectedness involves having someone to talk to, someone to trust, someone to depend on and someone who knows you well (Glover et al. 1998). An individual's level of social integration and social support are powerful predictors not only of their mental health status but also of morbidity and mortality (AHMAC Working Group 1997; Brunner 1997). For example, young people with poor social connectedness were two to three times more likely to experience depressive symptoms when compared with peers who reported the availability of confiding relationships (Glover et al. 1998). In recognition of the link between social connection and mental health, the Plan focuses on strategies to increase connections between individuals and communities.

Valuing diversity and working against discrimination

The link between discrimination and mental ill-health is well established, with exposure to discrimination increasing the risk of lowered self-esteem, social isolation, depression, anxiety, drug use and suicidal feelings (University of Surrey 1998). For example, higher suicide rates among Indigenous and same sex attracted young people have been attributed in part to discrimination on the grounds of race and sexual preference respectively (DHFS 1997; National Children's and Youth Law Centre 1998). Young people who are victimised are three times more likely to be at risk of having depressive symptoms when compared to those not reporting such experiences (Glover et al. 1998). Gender related discrimination and violence have been identified as factors contributing to mental health problems in women, among them excessive use of psychotropic medication and eating disorders (Raphael in Sorger 1995).

Victoria has a diverse community with some individuals and communities experiencing less favourable treatment than others. Accordingly, this aspect of the Plan focuses on strategies that address racial discrimination, homophobia and ageism.

Economic participation

Economic participation involves having access to employment as well as to the money necessary to feed, clothe and participate fully in community life. A growing body of evidence links poor mental health with limited access to important resources such as income, employment and education (Wilkinson & Marmot 1998). Unemployed people, for instance, experience higher levels of depression, anxiety and distress, as well as lower self-esteem, than their counterparts who are employed (McLelland & Scotton 1998). People living in areas with greatest inequalities in income are 30% more likely to report their health, including their mental health, as fair or poor compared with those living in areas with the smallest inequalities in income (Kennedy et al. 1998). There is also some evidence to suggest that economic and social inequality can undermine broader social cohesion, thus negatively impacting on social connectedness and community safety (Wilkinson 1997).

For these reasons, the Plan focuses on strategies to enhance people's access to economic resources such as education, employment and income.

combat unhealthy con

Health promotion action

Traditionally, health promotion practice has focused on behaviour modification and social marketing strategies to assist individuals to combat unhealthy conditions. While the Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002 recognises the importance of these strategies, it complements them with interventions to combat unhealthy conditions at their source. The Plan proposes, therefore, that a range of strategies be supported, including:

- research
- workforce development
- participation pilots
- community strengthening
- organisational development
- advocacy for legislative and policy reform
- communication and social marketing

Target population groups

A person's location in the broader social and economic structure, both as an individual and as a member of a particular population group, has a profound influence on their mental health. In general, those groups which have good access to social and economic resources have better mental health and lower rates of mental health problems than those whose access is limited (Power et al. 1997).

In the context of a finite funding base, the Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002 targets five population groups with demonstrably poorer access to those resources known to promote mental health and generally higher rates of mental health problems. These groups are:

- young people
- rural communities
- older women and men
- Koori communities
- new arrivals to Australia

ditions at their source

Settings for action

The Plan is based on the understanding that successful action to promote mental health and prevent mental illness can only be achieved and sustained with the involvement and support of the whole community and the development of collaborative partnerships across a range of sectors. This includes those in public, private and non-government organisations, both within the health sector and in other sectors that influence the way in which people live, are educated and work.

Accordingly, the Plan adopts an intersectoral approach and identifies a number of settings for action, including the community, workplaces, sporting facilities and education, health and arts organisations.

Anticipated outcomes

Ultimately, mental health promotion strategies are implemented with the aim of reducing preventable mental ill-health and promoting mental health at the population level, thereby improving productivity, contributing to improvements in physical health and reducing the social and economic costs associated with mental illness. These longer-term outcomes are made possible by building the capacity of individuals, communities and organisations to take action to foster the conditions required for mental health.

Capacity building at the individual level involves taking steps to improve health knowledge and awareness of, and capacity to access, services. At the community level it involves fostering environments which are safe and supportive and which offer accessible and appropriate opportunities for participation in community life.

Building capacity at the organisational level involves developing policies and programs which promote mental health and building organisational partnerships both within and outside the health sector. Partnerships between a variety of organisations are integral to intersectoral activity. They contribute to health promotion capacity by engaging a broader base of skills, expertise and resources as well as wider constituencies in the mental health promotion endeavour.

Accordingly, the activities in the Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002 have a focus on building individual, community and organisational capacity to promote mental health. In particular, the ability to establish effective and durable partnerships was a key priority for all schemes and projects initiated under the Plan.

The evaluation of the Plan itself and of individual schemes focuses on the extent to which the conditions described above have been achieved and on improving knowledge about effective strategies and processes for building health promotion capacity at the individual, community and organisational levels.

WHY INVEST IN MENTAL
HEALTH PROMOTION
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

3



Why Invest in Mental Health Promotion for Young People?

Adolescence is widely recognised by mental health practitioners and researchers as a time of transition, involving the shift from childhood to adulthood and from a position of financial and emotional dependence to one of independence. It is also a time when young people begin to form their own values and beliefs and to develop an adult identity. Most young people make this transition very successfully. Nevertheless, adolescence and early adulthood (defined for the purposes of this publication as being between 12 and 17 years) is a period when young people face particular constraints on their access to resources required for mental health and wellbeing (Mitchell 2000b). It is also a time of particular vulnerability to mental health problems.

It is estimated that two in every five young people in the community suffer from depressed mood in any six month period (NHMRC 1997) and that between 10 and 15% of adolescents will experience a major depression before reaching 18 years of age (ibid.).

Poor mental health can have a significant impact on the quality of life of young people and their families, affecting young people's self-esteem, school performance and peer relationships (Raphael 2000; Sawyer et al. 2000).

Since adolescence is a critical stage in the developmental, educational and career trajectories, emotional wellbeing and life circumstances during this time have a powerful influence on future relationships, education, employment opportunities and individual functioning (Health Education Authority 1998; Centre for Community and Child Health 2000). Interventions to promote the mental health and wellbeing of young people, therefore, have long-term benefits, both for young people themselves and for the wider society. They can help to avoid the long-term costs which would otherwise be involved in addressing the consequences of mental illness and disorder experienced in adolescence and early adulthood.

Significant social and economic changes in recent decades mean that contemporary cohorts of young people face particular challenges. Before the 1970s the transition to adulthood typically followed a pathway from education to employment and financial independence and, for many, coupling and home ownership. For young people today, however, this transition is likely to be longer, to follow a less linear pathway and to be far less certain and predictable (Dwyer & Wyn 2001). Young people are staying at school longer yet are less likely to have a guarantee of secure, meaningful or permanent employment (ibid.).

Evidence suggests that the mental health of young people today is poorer than in previous generations. Depression is appearing at a younger age and seems to be increasing in severity (Zubrik et al. 2000). The rate of male suicide increased by 71% from 14 per 100 000 in 1979 to 24 per 100 000 in 1997 (Cantor et al. in AIHW 1999). In most industrialised countries suicide is now among the three leading causes of death among people 15–24 years, being responsible for as many fatalities as road accidents and more than double those occurring in armed conflicts (Bertolote cited in Mitchell 2000b, p. 24).

As is the case with other populations targeted in the VicHealth Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002, certain groups of young people face particular limitations on their access to the resources required for mental health and wellbeing or are especially vulnerable to mental illness and disorder. Among them are young people from culturally diverse backgrounds (VHPF 2003), same sex attracted young people (DHAC 2001; Hillier et al. 1998; VHPF 2002), young people from rural and remote communities (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria 2002) and young people suffering poverty and social hardship, in particular unemployment and homelessness (DHAC 2001, p. 31; Health Education Authority 1998; Rew et al. 2001).

The relationship between socioeconomic status and health can be explained in terms of resources that elevate or sustain health status ie purchasing power (income), knowledge power (education) and employment power (prestige and control) (Veenstra 2000).

For these reasons, young people have been identified as a population of particular concern in a number of recent State and Commonwealth government policy and planning documents, including the report of the Victorian Task Force on Suicide Prevention (1997), the *National Suicide Prevention Strategy* (1997) and the Commonwealth's *Mental Health Promotion and Prevention National Action Plan* (1999).

Factors affecting young people's mental health

There is increasing consensus among mental health experts that two factors play a critical role in influencing the mental health of young people—resilience and self-concept. Benard (1996) identifies the following as being associated with resilience:

- social competence
- capacity for problem solving
- autonomy
- a sense of optimism and purpose

Fuller, McGraw and Goodyear (2002) argue that there are four key ways in which resilience can be enhanced. These are:

- having the experience of being a useful participant in society;
- being able to make a contribution, that is, being able to convert thoughts, ideas and concepts into action;
- having a sense of confidence and competence, that is, a sense of mastery and ability; and
- having a sense of connectedness with a range of people, including one's peers.

Similar conditions are identified in the literature relating to self-esteem and self-concept. For example, Phillip (1990) identifies three interconnected factors as contributing to a positive self-concept: a sense of control, a sense of bonding or connection to others, and a sense of meaning and purpose to life.

These themes of control, bonding and meaning are interconnected. A sense of control comes from the experiences of capability and the capacity to exert power over one's self, to use social and life skills, and to have an impact on one's environment. A sense of bonding involves a sense of belonging to or connection with others. It includes the need to be wanted and valued. A sense of meaning is created when a young person believes that she or he is significant and has the scope to make a difference or to play a useful role.

Social and economic factors play an important role in creating the conditions in which resilience and positive self-concept are fostered. Three determinants are identified in the Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999-2002 as being particularly influential—social connection, freedom from discrimination and violence and economic participation.

Social connection

As indicated earlier, young people's connections with others have a significant influence on their resilience and self-concept and consequently on their mental health. This is indicated in studies demonstrating that young people with better mental health and wellbeing tend to be those that have:

- positive, rewarding school environments and a sense of connectedness to a school and/or a community; and
- a nurturing, affectionate and secure relationship with adults, including a positive relationship with at least one parent and a supportive relationship with one other adult, such as a teacher, aunt or uncle (Raphael 2000).

Young people with well-established social networks tend to be better able to withstand crisis and upheaval (Wierenga 2002). The quality of relationships is also important, particularly the extent to which people have access to those who they trust (ibid.).

Supportive family and personal relationships and participation in social activities and institutions provide young people with a context in which they can give to and cooperate with others. This in turn affects the extent to which they feel valued. A young person's personal relationships and sense of connection to friends, schools and communities also influences their access to economic and material resources such as education and employment.

Particular characteristics of a community can also have an impact on young people's mental health, with studies indicating that supportive and protective communities enhance their resilience (Benard 1997). Benard identifies communities that are supportive and protective of young people as those in which there are:

- caring relationships which convey compassion, understanding and respect and which establish safety and basic trust;
- high expectation messages which offer guidance, structure and challenge; and
- opportunities for meaningful participation and contribution, including opportunities for valued responsibilities, making decisions, being heard and contributing to community.

Recent social and economic changes have had a major impact on the extent and quality of supportive relationships available to young people and their sense of social connectedness.

As discussed earlier, young people today face a more difficult and longer transition to adulthood than generations preceding them (Dusseldorp Skills Forum 2000). A number of commentators have argued that this transition has been made yet more complex by the increasing acceptance of social values of materialism, individualism and consumerism (Buchanan 2000; Eckersley 2002; Tacey 2000 cited in Mitchell 2000b, p. 98). These changes, it is argued, have the effect of undermining supportive relationships available to young people within communities, such that they not only face greater pressure to succeed but are required to do so in an environment in which supportive collectivist and compassionate ethical and social values are being eroded (*ibid.*). This is supported by research which indicates that those communities with high levels of connectedness tend to be those in which the predominant culture is one of cooperation (Fuller, McGraw & Goodyear 2002).

At the same time there have been significant cuts in government expenditure and hence reduced access to community and recreational facilities and supports that serve as sites for the formation of social connections (Wyn & White 2000).

The extent to which young people feel socially connected can also have an impact on their economic participation. For example, around 11 000 Victorian young people leave school each year without any kind of qualification even though they have limited job prospects (Kirby 2000 cited in James et al. 2001). Primary reasons for early school leaving identified by young people are concerned with the relational aspects of school life, such as limited satisfaction with school culture, lack of attention to social connections and schools' responses to student needs (Stokes 2000).

As discussed below, reduced opportunities for economic participation and exposure to discrimination and violence can also have an impact on young people's access to, and the quality of, supportive relationships and broader social connections.

Discrimination and violence

Exposure to discrimination and violence has a powerful negative impact on young people's resilience and self-concept and therefore their mental health and wellbeing. Social exclusion resulting from discrimination and violence affects young people's capacity to form social connections, while discriminatory practices, particularly in employment and education, can reduce young people's access to the resources required to plan and control their future. Social exclusion and discrimination can also have a negative impact on young people's perception of themselves, while exposure to violence can compromise their sense of safety and control.

Young people have much to contribute to the community and this is often reflected in positive portrayals in the media and the wider community. However, as a population they are also vulnerable to negative labelling. For example, groups of young people are often negatively characterised as 'gangs', leading in some circumstances to constraints being placed on their access to public spaces such as shopping malls and commercial entertainment venues (White 1999b) or an increased surveillance of young people in these public spaces. Boredom and feeling unwelcome in public domains can affect young people's perceptions of themselves and in turn lead to socially disruptive behaviour. As White (1999b) comments:

To a certain extent, much of the concern about gangs is really a misunderstanding of the nature of youth sub-cultures, of the fact that young people naturally associate with one another in groups and of the material opportunities open to them to circulate and do things in particular places.

Adolescence is also a time when young people can be particularly vulnerable to violence. Bullying of young people in school and recreational environments has been well documented (Glover et al. 1998) and has been shown to have significant mental health consequences (Rigby 2002). Young people also suffer a relatively high level of exposure to physical and sexual abuse in the home. It is estimated that 34% of adolescents in outpatient treatment have experienced physical abuse and 44% have suffered sexual abuse (Victorian Suicide Task Force 1997). Violence is of particular concern to young women, with an Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) survey finding that this group was more vulnerable to violence than any other age group surveyed (ABS 1996).

Economic participation

Education and employment have a critical influence on young people's mental health, contributing to the way in which they are defined and valued by themselves and in the wider society. Making progress within the education system or having secure employment also provides young people with the means to exercise control over their lives and their futures, to develop a sense of meaning and purpose, and to make a contribution to the wider society.

Paid work is seen as crucial in a practical sense because it provides essential income ... It also has psychological benefits, provides a recognised role in society and contributes to a sense of personal and social identity (Hartley 1992).

Importantly, educational institutions and workplaces are primary sites for making social connections and developing supportive relationships with peers and significant adults.

Changes in the way young people experience the transition to adulthood have meant that many young people face delayed entry to full-time employment, however. This may affect the way in which their contributions are valued both by themselves and others. Some commentators have argued that there is a need to develop a more holistic understanding of young people's choices and personal development, adding 'lifestyle, health and wellbeing ... to the two dimensions of education and work which in the past were used as central themes for making sense of young people's lives' (Dwyer et al. 2001, p. 42).

Recent Australian research indicates that there has been increasing casualisation of the labour market and an increase in high stress and precarious employment (Dwyer & Wyn 2001; Wyn & Dwyer 2000). These changes have particularly affected young people (Dwyer & Wyn 2001; Wyn & Dwyer 2000). In addition, economic changes and industry restructuring in Australia have meant that many jobs traditionally filled by young people have now disappeared (ibid.).

In recent decades Australia has experienced high rates of youth unemployment, with between 12.8 and 16.9% of young people being out of work in Victoria between 1996 and 2001. The Victorian Indigenous young people's unemployment rate in 2001 was 16.4% and for those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD) the unemployment rate was 18.5% (ABS 2002). It is estimated that one-quarter of young women and nearly a fifth of young men are at considerable labour force risk (Dusseldorp Skills Forum 2002, p.4).

Contemporary educational policy has the objective of encouraging young people to stay in school until the end of Year 12. This has the potential to enhance young people's mental health, with school being a significant focus for social connection and years of education being strongly correlated with better employment opportunities in adult life (James et al 2001; Lamb et al. 2000). Nevertheless, there is some evidence to suggest that these policies may be counter-productive for the significant number of young people whose needs are not met in the contemporary education system (Dwyer & Wyn 2001). These young people find themselves alienated within the school system. Rather than being socially connected for life, now or in the future, many may be simply 'doing time' in schools.

Young people who are economically disadvantaged face particular constraints on their access to resources for mental health and wellbeing. As Wierenga (2002) comments, 'Families can only offer young people what they have themselves'. Low income families are not only less able to afford to support young people to participate in the social, educational and sub-cultural life of their peers, but also face additional barriers to achieving effective parenting (Considine & Zappala 2002, p.144).

In summary, young people who are more supported and who are integrated into their communities will be more likely to achieve in education, in work and with friends, and to have better mental health and wellbeing. Our community responsibility lies in the provision of this support because it is an investment which will benefit the whole community in the immediate and long term.

Purpose of the Evaluation

In 1999, VicHealth called for proposals to promote the mental health and wellbeing of young people through increasing their economic participation. The projects in this Scheme were funded in the context of the Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002 and based on a logic which linked the factors influencing mental health to the conditions required to build individual, community and organisational capacity to address them. The five funded projects were:

- Artspace: Corangamite Youth Enterprise Project
- Kulcha Shift: Brophy Family and Youth Services, Warrnambool
- Changing Lanes Project: Nagle College, Bairnsdale
- Whitelion Juvenile Justice Employment Project Parkville: Whitelion Inc.
- Yarram Employment Project: Yarram and District Health Service

It was expected that the projects would:

- build on and strengthen existing government and community programs;
- assist young people to participate in economic activity;
- assist young people to access appropriate levels of income through economic participation;
- be established on a community basis using partnerships across agencies and organisations, determined by the needs and requirements of the targeted communities;
- develop innovative combinations of economic participation, research and individual support for young people;
- incorporate strategies for promoting and ensuring sustainability beyond the project's operation; and
- acknowledge, reflect and integrate the values, principles and priorities pertinent to VicHealth and the Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002 and address the key themes identified in the Plan.

In particular, VicHealth was interested in exploring:

- the extent to which the projects had been successful in building skills among young people and enhancing their mental health and wellbeing; and
- the capacity at the organisational and community levels to foster economic participation among young people.

VicHealth also allocated funds to conduct an evaluation of the five projects as a cluster. This evaluation model provided an important means of documenting and sharing the lessons learned, thereby contributing to the evidence base in mental health promotion. The cluster evaluation was conducted with a number of purposes in mind:

- to provide individual agencies with a common framework for reflecting, refining and reporting on their work which was coherent with the overall conceptual framework underpinning the Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002;
- to enable VicHealth to draw on the experience of the projects to assess their impact on the intermediate outcomes it was anticipated would be achieved through implementation of the Plan;
- to draw on the collective experience of the projects, hence increasing the power of the findings and the extent to which they could be generalised; and
- to document the findings in a form which could contribute to broader understanding of the processes and strategies involved in mental health promotion and be disseminated to a wider audience.



CASE STUDIES

In the following pages a collection of models and strategies trialled by the projects is described. The projects reflect rich and varied practice. Each project represented here is dealing with a specific community and with challenges identified over a period of time. Each is responding in ways that have been shaped by their organisational history and by their community's characteristics. There are some common aspects to these projects, however:

- Each project was developed in response to some disjunction between young people and their communities.
- Each project reported exclusion of young people from the labour market—low economic participation, youth unemployment, lack of knowledge of training and work options, and young people leaving the area to look for employment and education opportunities.
- Each project was based in an organisation that had a program focused on the needs of young people, from either a welfare or a developmental perspective, but had limited resources and capacity to implement it.

Consistent with the objectives of the Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002, each project aimed to build capacity at the individual, community and organisational level. They sought to achieve this on two dimensions—mental health and economic participation.

ARTSPACE: CORANGAMITE YOUTH ENTERPRISE PROJECT

A



There was a general awareness of the ‘symptoms’ of poor mental health among local young people (e.g. binge drinking, unsafe sex and youth suicide) but not of the broader issues that influence their mental health.

Artspace: Corangamite Youth Enterprise Project

The history

Artspace—the Corangamite Youth Enterprise Project (CYEP)—is located in a shopfront on the main street of Camperdown in the Corangamite Shire in south-western Victoria and is managed by Terang Resources Incorporated. It operates an arts-focused space for young people as a springboard for work-based training, experience and support.

The project developed from a 1999 regional youth forum at which young people expressed an interest in establishing a space to pursue their interests in the arts. Subsequently, Terang Resources was invited by the Department of State and Regional Development to join other south-west Victorian youth services providers to develop a youth enterprise strategy for the region.

In April 2000, the Artspace Corangamite Youth Enterprise Project was funded as a 12-month pilot program within the Victorian Government's Youth Enterprise South West (YESW) strategy by the then Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET). The objectives were to engage young people in a range of activities in visual and performance arts, media, information technology and event management with a focus on leadership skills.

In the initial phase it was discovered that the most effective activities were those initiated and implemented by young people themselves and the most lasting skills were those acquired in the process of project and event management. Young people also gained considerable skill in refurbishing a derelict facility for the enterprise and raising community consciousness about the interests and aspirations of local youth.

At the end of the 12-month contract with DEET, Corangamite Shire and Terang Resources funded the project for three further months until funding from VicHealth was secured.

The context

The Corangamite Shire is particularly affected by the drift of young people to urban centres. Most young people believe they will leave the area once they have completed secondary education in order to access further education or training.

Job creation and enterprise development in the area had been limited due to the Shire's narrow labour market base. Over 50% of young people were employed in retail, agriculture or manufacturing. There was little awareness of training opportunities available within the Corangamite Shire among young people or of the variety of employment choices open to them, including self-employment.

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The local community tended to resist change and there had been a low level of participation by young people in formal decision-making in the community and a lack of information about their rights and the processes and skills required to become active participants of the community. While young people were seldom invited to participate in community consultation they were frequently criticised for their lack of engagement.

Similar attitudes were also reflected in local perceptions of the mental health of young people, with mental wellbeing regarded as a matter of strength and willpower and illness as a weakness. Young people were seen to have low self-esteem and there was a fear of stigma associated with difference or with mental illness. Young people who did not have mainstream interests, such as involvement in sporting activities, were particularly socially isolated.

Terang Resources Inc. had 21 years experience in service delivery and was well known to the community. At the start of this project it had already received negative community feedback for drawing attention to those in need. It recognised that while it understood issues of mental health and economic participation it had a limited capacity to address the economic and mental health circumstances of local young people.

While there was a culture of caring in the broader community, there was in some quarters a suspicion of diversity, a resistance to change and little value given to youth initiatives and enterprises. There was a general awareness of the 'symptoms' of poor mental health among local young people (e.g. binge drinking, unsafe sex and youth suicide) but not of the broader issues that influence their mental health.

Wellbeing

The plan

The objectives of the project were conceptualised on the three dimensions of young people, organisations and community as shown below.

<i>Level</i>	<i>Aims</i>
Young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for young people to find meaningful paid and unpaid work and to designate market value to all unpaid work • Enable young people to visualise and develop their knowledge and skills • Through alliances with businesses and the Economic Development Board, assist young people to move into business • Assist work placement in local industry after training to enhance employment prospects • Enable young people to grow in autonomy and personal resilience and build their self-esteem and confidence
Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better integrate the Youth Enterprise Project in Terang Resources so that it is seen as core business rather than a pilot or 'one-off' project • Change the image of Terang Resources' programs from welfare to community building
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better integrate youth into the economic life of the Shire • Help make the community more accepting of the involvement of young people in the economic life of the community • Increase the participation of young people in the social life of the community through involvement in organisations and associations • Increase the retention of young people in the population of the local community

The action

The project developed around two principal community development activities for young people—the creation of an arts-focused space and the development of a Youth Economic Participation Reference Group (YEPRG) that undertook a youth audit. The focus was on mental health promotion through the medium of the arts.



A Youth arts space

Maintaining a space for young people was central to the project's work. It provided a focus and a venue for:

- informal contact and consultation with young people—as well as being a 'drop-in' venue, Artspace also provided a 'springboard' for the participation of young people in planning activities;
- the development of formal management skills through participation in decision-making and committee structures;
- experience of voluntary work (which in many cases led to paid work or traineeships), arts-based skill development and contacts for arts-related work (logo design, murals);
- development of arts-based skills through involvement in maintaining and administering the gallery space and accessing informal training in skills associated with the arts; and
- exhibitions, seminars and classes.

The Lees IGA Artspace mural was completed the week prior to Youth Week. A mural brief has now been developed and more murals are planned. The first of these is a mural at the Camperdown Public Pool.

Youth audit

As an aim of the project was to increase the profile of young people in the community, an audit of youth needs was conducted through a series of Future Vision Summits held in local schools.

The Corangamite Youth Audit was designed by the coordinators in conjunction with Terang Mortlake Health Service and three young people. After it was tested by a group of young people at Artspace, it was used to survey 100 young people from the Corangamite Shire (representing 5% of the local young people).

The audit enabled service providers to better understand the lifestyles and needs of young people. It was hoped that the information and evidence collected would enhance the capacity of local youth services to engage and provide support to young people with the intention of reversing the drift of young people to urban areas.

The partners

While the following table identifies the formal partners in Artspace, the project also linked with a further 15 local agencies for the purposes of undertaking specific activities, forging links between the project and young people, and securing advice, guidance and resources to undertake the project.

<i>Partners</i>	<i>Contribution</i>
Terang Resources Incorporated	Lead agency
Terang Mortlake Community Health Service	Health information and education materials Assistance with funding for sustainability
Cobden District Health Service	Collaboration on specific project activities Links with young people, especially through schools
Corangamite Shire	Links with young people
Corangamite Development Board	Business based knowledge and guidance Information on funding options
Corangamite District Adult Education Group	Education and training expertise

KULCHA SHIFT: BROPHY FAMILY AND YOUTH SERVICES

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Training was offered in group settings and on an individual basis, with the objectives being to improve young people's ability to work with others, manage themselves and be part of the community.

Kulcha Shift: Brophy Family and Youth Services

The history

In May 1999, under the Victorian Government's Youth Enterprise South West (YESW) strategy, a group of young people came together in Warrnambool to organise the first Youth Enterprise Forum. The Kulcha Shift Youth Committee was formed from this forum and became the main focus for the generation of ideas and activities for young people in Warrnambool. This committee is now auspiced and supported by Brophy Family and Youth Services to ensure its sustainability and links with the community.

The Kulcha Shift Youth Cooperative was established in 2000 as a pilot project funded by VicHealth through the Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002 to increase young people's mental wellbeing through economic participation and community connectedness. The Cooperative is based on an economic participation model and is in the unique position of combining social welfare and community development with economic involvement.

The context

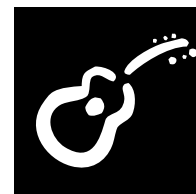
The project worked with youth participants. Of these, 70% were in education and 40% had part-time jobs. The remainder were unemployed. Some young people had ideas about small business enterprises; however, only a small number had developed these ideas. The young people were generally unskilled and untrained in both vocational and communication skills such as problem solving and teamwork. They were minimally engaged in decision-making, tending to follow instructions given in school and employment situations.

Staff at Brophy Family and Youth Services were primarily involved in providing welfare and direct service provision and had little knowledge of economic participation as a contributing factor to mental health. The organisation generally did not see the relevance of economic participation to its core business or its clients.

The community, however, had structures in place to foster economic participation through the establishment of individual and collective enterprises such as the Warrnambool Business Centre and tertiary training available at Deakin University and South West TAFE.

There was limited understanding of the term mental health in the community, with the focus tending to be on mental illness. There were a number of agencies working to better inform the public, however.

wellbeing



The plan

<i>Level</i>	<i>Aims</i>
Young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resource young people in Warrnambool to develop their capabilities to participate in economic activity within the community• Resource young people's expectations for personal development, teamwork, support and learning opportunities• Link young people's initiatives to other parts of the community
Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilitate the continued development of youth initiated projects• Promote and market the Kulcha Shift Youth Cooperative to the community as a strategy that encourages young people to actively participate in economic activities
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• As above

The action

The project developed around four 'activity centres' directly addressing economic participation and mental health issues. The four areas were:

- event management
- a retail outlet
- information technology
- magazine production

A range of activities was developed in each of these centres enabling young people to engage with the community, interact with their peers, learn new skills and strengthen their capacity to connect with employment and training opportunities.

While operating predominantly in the activity centres, Kulcha Shift maintained the flexibility to pursue emerging ideas. For example, in partnership with the local Job Placement, Education and Training (JPET) program, the project developed a documentary which features the stories, enterprises and contributions of local young people, celebrates their talents and highlights the opportunities available to them in the region. The documentary demonstrates that young people can achieve success and contribute to the diversity and future of rural areas.

ing

Training was an integral component of all Kulcha Shift activities, with each activity centre having a well-developed training manual addressing the skills and experience required by young people to gain employment in the industry concerned.

Through the project, young people have received technical training, personal development opportunities and employment preparation. Training was offered in group settings and on an individual basis, with the objectives being to improve young people's ability to work with others, manage themselves and be part of the community.

Event management

A range of creative and unique community events was organised by young people through Kulcha Shift, addressing a clear need for safe and affordable entertainment options for local young people and for an avenue to showcase young people's talents and achievements.

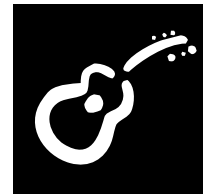
Events included skate and music festivals, fashion parades, open stage nights, art and multimedia exhibitions and magazine launches. Each event was developed and organised by a team of young people who received training in all aspects of event management as well as in personal and leadership skills.

A retail outlet

The retail outlet provided enterprising young people with a prime location to display and sell their products, giving them the opportunity to learn about small business and enterprise in a supported and encouraging environment. At the same time, it responded to the demand for unique, creative and reasonably priced products in the community and among tourists visiting the city.

A training program was offered, giving young people the opportunity to receive valuable one-on-one training in all aspects of retail operations at the same time as other skills required to seek employment or in a work situation. Two young people gained full-time work in retail after completing the training program.

well



Information Technology (IT)

This component of the project promoted the IT skills and talents of young people to local businesses and organisations and the community. A multimedia exhibition was held to demonstrate the diversity of the field and an IT database was established to link local businesses to young people with skills in IT. Young people were also offered the opportunity to develop their resumes in CD format for use when marketing themselves to prospective employers.

Magazine production

The Kulcha magazine has addressed a range of youth related issues, celebrated the successes of local young people and offered interesting, informative and sometimes humorous reading. Kulcha has included articles on depression, refugees, eating disorders and moods as well as artwork, poetry and comics.

Young people work and are trained as a team on all aspects of the magazine, while many others have the opportunity to see their work in print.

mental health and being

The partners

<i>Partners</i>	<i>Contribution</i>
Brophy Family and Youth Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead agency
JPET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various joint project activities • Sharing of resources (e.g. meeting space) • Links with young people
Warrnambool City Council, Youth and Economic Development Units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various joint project activities • Links with young people through the Youth Council • Economic development expertise • Mentoring and advice in major event management
Job Pathways Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job seeking and job preparation service to project participants
Community Corrections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links with young people with offending histories
Young Achievers Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links with young people
Aspire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links with young people with a mental illness • Joint community awareness activities on mental health and young people

CHANGING LANES: NAGLE COLLEGE BAIRNSDALE



The program operates as a 'cooperative' with the participants 'buying' shares through their input of time. Each participant is issued one share for every four hours 'worked' (two shares per day) and disbursement of members' profit is distributed accordingly.

Changing Lanes

The history

Changing Lanes is a diversion program designed to stimulate young people's interest in a non-threatening, relaxed atmosphere and to provide genuine life skill learning opportunities. It is based around a workshop engaging young people in basic fabrication, engineering and mechanical repair projects.

The project is based at Nagle College, a Catholic Preparatory to Year 12 school in Bairnsdale. It targets young people in the 13 to 24-year age group (mainly 13–17 years) living in East Gippsland who are considered to be 'at risk' and is particularly designed to suit those understood to be exhibiting anti-social behaviour. Young people are referred by various agencies, including local schools, Juvenile Justice, community youth agencies, the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative (GEGAC) and regional health services. Young people can also refer themselves or be referred by their families.

Changing Lanes was based on experience gained in an earlier project established by the Meerindoo Youth Accommodation service with funding from the National Suicide Prevention Program. When funding expired, the project continued to operate on a 'hand-to-mouth', 'week-by-week' basis, depending on handouts from local agencies, but was eventually forced to close. While a formal evaluation of the Meerindoo Workshop Program was never conducted, the anecdotal evidence indicated that young people; their families and the local community valued it. This widespread support continues in the project's current form as the Changing Lanes Program.

mental health
well



The context

East Gippsland is affected by high unemployment rates among young people, a high juvenile crime rate, drug usage, binge drinking and a disturbing rise in the incidence of self-harm. These anti-social and risk-taking activities were particularly prevalent among disaffected young people who saw no future either in employment or at school.

The Changing Lanes Program was working intensively with up to 30 young people per year. The participants were both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, came from across the socioeconomic spectrum and included young men and women. As a cohort they generally (but not always) displayed a range of unmet educational and social needs concerned with connectedness to school, family and the workforce.

Others saw these young people as having little or no sense of belonging and low self-esteem, with attention being drawn to eating disorders, substance abuse and binge drinking. Many of the young people needed support to develop their literacy and numeracy skills, confidence in interpersonal relations and other skills required to enhance their employability.

Health and
being

The plan

<i>Level</i>	<i>Aims</i>
Young people	<p><i>Economic</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide new and lifelong skills • Enhance employment prospects • Improve school, work and training retention rates <p><i>Health</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve young people's ability to relate to adults • Reduce self-harm, depression and risk-taking behaviour in young people through developing a relationship with a significant person or group of people with a common and clearly defined goal • Build self-esteem • Improve outlook on life • Address antisocial and illegal behaviour
Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve community agencies (commercial, regional, health, education and welfare) in cooperative support of local youth
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase community connectedness for marginalised youth • Reduce and refocus the number of Indigenous young people before the court system

The action

While the original idea was to concentrate on metal fabrication, a decision was made to include basic mechanical work to broaden the project's appeal to young people from local rural communities as well as ensuring a regular income stream.

Participants worked on a variety of mechanical repair jobs involving cars, tractors, trucks, small engines, trailers and agricultural machinery, as well as small fabrication jobs such as candelabras, food smokers, barbecues and camping equipment.

The workshop was established in existing facilities at Nagle College. With equipment and resources from the College, the instructor and some judicious purchases, it has become a well-equipped and functional workshop. Participants are encouraged to see the workshop and the projects as theirs and to be proud of their workplace and their achievements.



Originally, participants were to complete a 12-week period of training, attending one full day per week. This was to be followed by a four-week work placement within local industry, with an opportunity to work for a further period in the fabrication process. In practice, it became apparent that there was a need for flexibility in the training to ensure it was compatible with the needs of individual participants. For some, 12 weeks was too long, whilst for others it was far too short.

To ensure this flexibility, consultation was held with each participant, the referring agency, the instructor and College staff. All aspects of the proposed program, including mentoring, work placements and a work preparation course, were discussed and a tailored program designed.

The four-week work placement, held in local industry at the end of the workshop experience and preparation for employment training, was a crucial part of the project, particularly for those who appeared at the greatest risk.

The program operates as a 'cooperative' with the participants 'buying' shares through their input of time. Each participant is issued one share for every four hours 'worked' (two shares per day) and disbursement of members' profit is distributed accordingly.

While it was always anticipated that the business side of the program would be tough, in practice the mechanical workshop generated reasonable returns for participants.

When participants complete their Changing Lanes Program they have a formal graduation and receive a reference, photo record, statement of achievement and payment for their time.

The project also incorporated a mentor program that provided a focus for developing young people's connections and a way of breaking down perceptions held in the community about marginalised youth. College staff took on a mentoring role with the participants and a keen interest in their involvement in Changing Lanes. The mentors have daily contact with the program and this has helped to build a healthy respect and social connections, with the young people often finding themselves working alongside College maintenance staff on workshop activities.

The project worker is a key person in Changing Lanes and his industry background, temperament and attitude to young people are key factors in its success. The Changing Lanes instructor is a local mechanic with considerable experience working with young people considered to be marginalised and at risk.

The partners

<i>Partners</i>	<i>Contribution</i>
Nagle College	Lead agency, mentoring
Catholic Education Office	Links with local schools
Bairnsdale Secondary College	Links with young people and support
Juvenile Justice	Links with young people with offending histories
Gippsland/East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative (GEGAC)	Links with Indigenous young people, their families and communities
East Gippsland TAFE	Education and training expertise
Shire of East Gippsland	Advice and guidance
The local business and industry community	Advice and guidance Links with work opportunities

WHITELION EMPLOYMENT PROJECT

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When applying for work, these young people were faced with a dilemma. They could choose to disclose their criminal history and current situation to a potential employer—and risk not securing the job—or conceal or lie about their past and risk losing the job later if found out.

Whitelion Employment Project

The Whitelion Employment Project is based at the Parkville Youth Residential Centre (PYRC). It encourages economic participation and independence for young people by utilising community and business partnerships to provide employment skills training and casual, part-time or full-time work for young people in the Centre.

Program participants are young people undertaking a sentence at the PYRC, an alternative to an adult correctional facility for young men under the age of 15 and for women between the ages of 17 and 21 years. They are from various cultural and economic backgrounds and from geographic locations throughout the State.

The program commenced at the PYRC in mid-2000 by bringing in role models (usually from an elite sporting background) to spend time interacting with and inspiring young people.

The PYRC manager (now Whitelion chief executive officer) attended a REACH youth camp with three young people from the PYRC. The camp aimed to bring business people together with young people from a diverse range of backgrounds. By hearing young people's stories and experiences, the business people gained an insight into the difficulties facing the young people. Offers of employment were subsequently made on the understanding that staff at Whitelion would coordinate them.

VicHealth funding for this component commenced on 1 July 2001.

The context

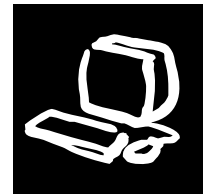
Young people participating in the program had low levels of successful education and few skills and formal credentials. They lived highly mobile and chaotic lives, and had experienced a range of problems, such as difficult family circumstances, drug use and emotional and physical abuse, and were disconnected from positive role models and community.

The young people also had a range of mental health issues, including low self-esteem, limited belief in their own abilities and anger and frustration in dealing with challenging situations. They were wary of change or taking chances.

The young people themselves believed that they were not worth giving a chance to. Their ability to interact or connect with 'normal' people was forced and unnatural. They felt uneasy about making commitments to times and dates due to their past chaotic lives.

When I was first asked to get a job through Whitelion I said 'no way', because all I kept thinking about was how many more times if I relapse or something, will I wreck other people's lives, like at my other work when I stuffed up. (Participant)

we



While the young people were keen to gain employment, this was difficult given the nature of their lives, drug use, criminal history and limited education. In their responses to project surveys they revealed a long history of school exclusion and difficulties accessing employment and income support. Although some had had unskilled 'cash-in-hand' work, few had training in preparation for employment or in job search skills such as resume preparation or interview techniques.

When applying for work, these young people were faced with a dilemma. They could choose to disclose their criminal history and current situation to a potential employer—and risk not securing the job—or conceal or lie about their past and risk losing the job later if found out.

Jane B started working in a fast food outlet while still in custody. Her manager was concerned that Jane had a ride home after her shift and asked who would be picking her up. She said that her brother was. Parkville Youth Residential Centre employs youth workers of different ages and cultural backgrounds. The youth worker Jane expected to pick her up was off sick and another youth worker—40 years older and of different colour and ethnic background—arrived to pick her up. Jane found it hard to explain why her 'brother' was so much older and so different in appearance.

At the same time the world of business had very little knowledge about or compassion for young people at the PYRC and sometimes even feared them. This led to young people feeling an antagonism toward prospective employers.

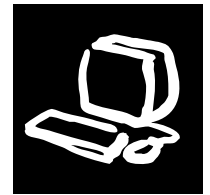
It was also very difficult to coordinate employment opportunities given the organisational constraints of a correctional facility. Conditions of leave were structured and access to staff and vehicles was difficult. Mandatory medical, legal and psychological appointments made employment processes yet more complex. While Whitelion had some limited expertise in dealing with the broad range of issues facing the young people, it had no special understanding of their mental health needs or of the impact of these issues on their bid to secure and maintain employment.

libbeing

The plan

The project aimed to provide employment opportunities for young people at the PYRC while supporting and educating the young people, the PYRC, employers and the Whitelion program itself.

<i>Level</i>	<i>Aims</i>
Young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve mental health, wellbeing, confidence and self-worth through the provision of successful employment experiences • Provide access to personal development and training prior to commencing work or in their workplace • Empower young people to contribute to decisions about their future for self-control and positive self-esteem • Increase connectedness between young people and their communities • Increase the length of time young people are in employment by assisting them with other life issues that impact on their employment
Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place and support new and existing young people in employment • Provide support and material aid for young people, prior, during and beyond the work placement • Develop and formalise pre-employment training for young people • Give positive role-modelling and support from peers and adults from the workplace • Expand contacts and networks to increase a variety of employment options both geographically and vocationally while maintaining those already connected • Increase support to employers by educating them better • Strengthen community connectedness between young people and organisations • Enhance understanding of employment and mental health issues within this group
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate employers about the program and young people • Increase understanding in the community and among employers of employment and mental health issues • Enhance the capacity of employers and community groups to deal with employment and mental health issues of this group of young people



The action

The project was based on the theory that the experience of work would provide young people with some financial independence, work-based contacts and an orientation to the culture of the workplace, thereby increasing their self-esteem and confidence.

A full-time youth worker was employed to provide intensive support to participants and to support companies and employers offering employment placements to better understand and respond to the needs of the young people. A number of activities were implemented in the course of the project, including liaison with young people and stakeholders, employer training and support, training for young people and provision of resources.

Liaison with young people and other stakeholders

Visits were made to PYRC units to meet with young people and to promote the program and its benefits to youth workers. The project workers attended client service plan (CSP) meetings as a key pre- and post-release service provider, enabling them to form an overall picture of the young person and their life background and to liaise with other key service providers and families.

Employer training and support

Education sessions were hosted at PYRC and other venues to support current employers and introduce new ones to the program. In all, 12 major and seven smaller functions were organised involving between 20 and 120 participants each. These activities gave the young people and the employers the opportunity to have input, share concerns and gain information and advice. At some of the sessions tours of PYRC were conducted during which employers were able to meet with young people.

The programs they run, the breakfasts, the dinners, all that kind of thing; the educational part of it—educating employers, people like me who didn't have a clue what I was dealing with—that's all great. It's part and parcel of the support.

Employer

Training for young people

Six sessions were conducted for young people aimed at raising self-esteem and fostering their employment skills. More specific training was also conducted in the workplace.

Resources

The project provided young people and employers with a range of resources to support the employment process (see box) as well as producing material to promote the program itself. The latter included a quarterly newsletter in which the young people were asked to contribute their views about the program and a promotional video involving interviews with employers, young people and other significant contributors to the program.

Resources to support the employment process

To support **young people** the project:

- Purchased the 'JIIG-CAL' Career Voyage, a vocational guidance computer program that can be used by young people to ascertain what occupations are compatible with their interests and skills and to establish the training requirements for particular jobs
- Provided funding and support to participate in educational courses
- Gave access to facilities at Whitelion after release to update resumes and access facsimile and email facilities to apply for jobs
- Developed a wardrobe of donated clothing so that young people could dress appropriately for work, leisure and day-to-day activities
- Provided funds to assist with travel, food and outstanding phone or rental bills and furniture for those attempting independent living
- Developed a network of professionals through which young people could access free advice on legal, medical, housing, counselling and taxation matters
- Provided ongoing support beyond their employment placements

For prospective **employers** the project:

- Prepared the Whitelion 'Employers Pack' describing the employment program in greater detail

The partners

<i>Partners</i>	<i>Contribution</i>
Whitelion Inc.	Lead agency
Parkville Youth Residential Centre (PYRC)	Links to young people and resources
Participating employers	Provision and support of employment placements
Other support agencies working with participants	Coordination and support of employment placements

YARRAM YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENTERPRISE PROJECT

E



The skills and profile of young people were increased through their involvement in the process of meetings, decision-making and implementation of the community awareness campaign.

Yarram Young People's Enterprise Project

The history

The Small Rural Communities Health Consortium (SRCHC) is a partnership between the health services in Beaufort, Corryong, Heathcote, Orbost, Tallangatta and Yarram. The partnership was formed in the belief that when communities are economically, socially, environmentally and culturally healthier and more vibrant, individuals in those communities will be physically and mentally healthier.

This project arose from the 'serendipity' (McLean 2002) of different factors and developments. These included:

- an increasing interest locally and regionally in the need for greater community connectedness and rural youth employment opportunities;
- the establishment of the Alberton Project in Yarram and District;
- the growth of new approaches to rural community revival and development using techniques such as study circles;
- the establishment of the Strengthening Families and Communities Program by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services with its focus on rural revitalisation; and
- the availability of funding from VicHealth.

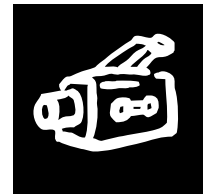
The context

Yarram is a community of 1807 people (ABS 1996) that, like many rural communities, has been slowly losing its population (decreasing 0.9% per annum between 1981 and 1996). This population loss is largely due to young people leaving the community in search of employment and education opportunities in regional centres and the metropolitan area.

Yarram has a strong retail presence and is the main service area for the south-west section of the Wellington Shire. It also has a sound agricultural base in dairy, forestry and mixed farming.

Yarram has been participating in a revitalisation project aimed at building community capacity in a holistic sense—the Alberton Project. The Yarram Young People's Enterprise Project (YEP) has a strong but independent relationship with the Alberton Project.

wellbeing



The plan

<i>Level</i>	<i>Aims</i>
Young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Address issues relating to young people's participation and connectedness through the vehicle of establishing small businesses• Enhance young people's leadership and confidence
Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore the possibility of adapting experiential and transformational learning techniques previously used with adults in rural communities
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enable the community to explore and address its role in the mental health and wellbeing of young people through the vehicle of small business

The action

The Yarram Young People's Enterprise Project, unlike the other projects in the Scheme, was a new project that did not exist prior to receiving VicHealth funding. It had a staged development which has taken place over three years. VicHealth funding added value to the funding from the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services' Strengthening Families and Communities Program.

The first stage of the project provided opportunities for raising and discussing the issues affecting young people and included the production of a video.

A local video

Action research and consultation were undertaken during stage one. A working group was established to use local media and existing local businesses and community networks to raise the profile of the project across the broader community. A range of participatory strategies were implemented commencing with a community workshop.

A short video—'Yarram and District: A Place to Be'—was produced by 10 young people which included interviews with over 50 people including primary school children, dairy farmers, retired people, tourists, retail owners, secondary school students, timber, service and health industry workers and others. Common themes raised in the video included reasons for living in the area, the need for creativity, and a generally positive outlook for the future. Furthermore over 200 personal interview surveys were collected with over 100 business ideas generated.

This video highlighted the benefits of living locally and work and recreational opportunities in the area and promoted Yarram as a healthy locale with a future for young people and their employment. The skills and profile of young people were increased through their involvement in the process of meetings, decision-making and implementation of the community awareness campaign. Some outcomes included:

- improved community skills to create and implement solutions to community problems;
- an ability within the community for cooperation between diverse interests;
- training of young community leaders; and
- use of local media to raise the profile of the project.

Development of business ideas

Stage two of the project is underway and has involved the identification and development of business proposals which have an agricultural focus.

The partners

<i>Partners</i>	<i>Contribution</i>
Yarram and District Community Health Service	Lead agency
Wellington Shire	Project Working Group member
Yarram Secondary College	Links with education sector
Industrial Supplies Office	Project Working Group member
East Gippsland Institute of TAFE	Education and training support
Local businesses	Project Working Group member
Small Rural Communities Health Consortium	Project Working Group member

THE EVALUATION

4



The Evaluation

The main purpose of the evaluation was to explore the links between young people's participation in economic activity and its impact on mental health and wellbeing. It did this through focusing on project outcomes on three dimensions—the young people, the organisations and the communities—and according to two themes—economic participation and mental health. It also investigated the extent to which any impacts were likely to be sustained over time. The key question was: 'Did the projects enhance capacity for mental health promotion and economic participation?'

Outcomes for young people

Supporting young people's capacity for economic participation

The projects were successful in providing young people with opportunities for economic participation in a range of forms. Activities included:

- employment placements;
- unpaid work;
- opportunities for income generation;
- education and training;
- interventions aimed at developing personal job search and small business skills; and
- information about options for education, training and employment.

These activities helped to enhance the young people's capacity for economic participation by enhancing their skills and knowledge about work and work options, fostering positive attitudes to employment and supporting their efforts to gain employment.

It's fun, and we can learn something that we can use later. It's hands-on and you get lots of Peg's attention when you need it. There are only two students and Peg, so he has time for us. Peg is a great teacher. He is strict on safety and polite and explains to us so we can understand. (Changing Lanes participant)

Enhancing skills

As well as skills specific to particular jobs (such as training in the arts or hospitality), the projects fostered generic skills such as decision-making, planning and organisation that are transferable to other areas of economic activity. A young woman who was actively involved in many aspects of the Artspace project, including the youth committee, was subsequently successful in securing a sports and recreation traineeship at the local council. The manager responsible for recruiting her attributed the Shire's decision in part to the relevance of the young woman's Artspace experience to her new position. A young woman participating in the Kulcha Shift training program was inspired by other young people who supplied the retail outlet. Using the business planning skills developed in the course she established a small business making original jewellery pieces.

Enhancing knowledge about work and work options

The projects provided participants with knowledge about particular jobs as well as other possibilities in their field of interest. A participant in Changing Lanes reported that he valued the opportunity to gain mechanical experience through the project as he felt it would enhance his prospects of securing training and employment in the industry. Other projects provided young people with contacts in the industries they aspired to work in or broadened their knowledge of other employment opportunities available to them.

The projects also worked with young people to involve them in planning for employment. This was illustrated in the Whitelion project in which participants were offered vocational assessments to assist them in planning their future in the workforce.

Fostering positive changes in individual attitudes to employment

A number of the projects were successful in supporting participants to develop positive attitudes to employment, in particular in relation to decisions about whether to go to work. Through his participation in Changing Lanes, a young person who had previously had a pattern of poor school attendance and behaviour developed a positive attitude about school. In some of the projects young people gained their first experience of workplace culture. The Kulcha Shift project engaged young sole parent women in its retail outlet, many of whom had not previously held a paid job.

Supporting participants to gain and maintain employment

The projects supported young people to address barriers to gaining and maintaining employment. Participants in the Whitelion project were able to access clothing to attend job interviews. This project also worked in partnership with employers to offer employment placements that were flexible to the constraints of the Training Centre environment:

Jane C, while in custody, obtained and lost two jobs before being given a Whitelion job. The first job was as a cash-in-hand sandwich maker and she was told she could not continue with this while she was in custody as it was illegal. Her second job was legal and going well until the constrictions of her leave impacted on her work. Because she hadn't told her employer that she was in custody they soon stopped giving her shifts as they weren't tolerant of her custodial needs. Jane was then offered a Whitelion job. She was more relaxed about sharing her issues with her manager at work and the flexibility she needed was recognised.

Enhancing young people's mental health

Throughout this document a number of attributes understood to enhance resilience and mental health are identified. Evidence from the evaluation suggests that the project activities were instrumental in strengthening these qualities among participants.

Participation in project activities was seen to contribute to a growth in confidence; self-worth; view of the future; capacity to work with others, particularly adults; and pride in work. Participants developed a better understanding of themselves and an appreciation that they had skills that were valued and appreciated.

Many of the skills learned through participation in the projects were relevant to other aspects of young people's lives, such as decision-making about themselves and competence in communication. Young people contributing to the Kulcha Shift magazine reported an increased sense of confidence, a deeper insight into what they could achieve and a sense of possibility for the future. Involvement in magazine production also provided experience in goal setting and time management. Leadership skills learned by one of the participants in the project gave them the confidence to apply to travel overseas to participate in a leadership camp. In Changing Lanes staff reported that the young people developed a deeper understanding of themselves, improved self-esteem and self-worth and an appreciation that they had skills and abilities that were wanted and valued by others, particularly adults.

John was involved at Artspace. After a short period of involvement, he was given the responsibility of opening Artspace on Saturdays. This step of trust on the part of the coordinator led to an improved sense of self-esteem in John. His mental health has improved dramatically. While he was always friendly and had an infectious personality, he was also originally suspicious and frequently negative. He was identified as 'at risk' of leaving school. Now he still isn't your average 'good' kid at school but is held in high esteem by many teachers and is shown trust and respect in the community. John has had the opportunity to become aware of and develop his own unique talents through training. John has subsequently taken on a wide range of responsibilities and gathered many skills in service and communication as well as the performing arts.

We gained confidence through being involved in the activities, such as talking to customers and setting up exhibitions. We learnt to talk to people older than us.

(Artspace)

There has been an increase in the self-concept and self-esteem of the young people through recognition of the impact of their actions on their sense of self worth. This has then impacted positively on their families and also on the community and encouraged increased links with the community.

(Artspace Coordinator)

A common finding of the projects was that young people improved their understanding of factors contributing to mental health and wellbeing. This resulted from the exploration of broader mental health and wellbeing issues through the projects.

Each of the projects made a conscious effort to ensure that activities were inclusive of a range of people and that diversity was promoted as a positive attribute. This contributed to a greater acceptance of diversity and an understanding of its links to mental health and wellbeing, an increased openness among participants, a greater self-awareness and a willingness to share stories.

This approach reaped positive benefits for participants who had suffered the effects of social exclusion.

Jane A had little self-esteem or self-worth and interacted very little with her peers at PYRC. She would always put herself down as unworthy and exhibited signs of depression. She was surprised when Whitelion offered to help find her work and was extremely thankful when she was offered a work experience position, so much so that she burst into tears and cooked a cake as a way of saying thank you. After six months at work she is constantly astounded by how well the people at her workplace treat her and still brought to tears when an act of kindness is directed her way.

Several projects also had the effect of enhancing the overall positive recognition of the voice and value of young people among participants themselves. In the Yarram project, a group of 10 young people were involved in producing a video that tapped the views and experiences of a range of people. The process of developing the video, and the fact that it was subsequently screened at the local school, affirmed the value of young people and their contributions to the broader community.

Links between economic participation and mental health

Investigation of the links between economic participation and mental health outcomes provided some interesting findings. A focus on this relationship was based on the understanding that participation in economic activity provides young people with a range of resources likely to protect and promote their mental wellbeing, in particular access to appropriate levels of income, the enhancement of life skills, the promotion of attachment and belonging, and opportunities for control.

Work is the primary source through which we define ourselves and through which we are defined and valued by others. It is particularly important to young people who are in the process of establishing their identities and preparing for adult life. It was especially important for the participants in these projects as many of them had been marginalised from mainstream social and economic institutions and processes. The projects gave young people the opportunity to participate in valued activities. The mental health benefits of this were illustrated throughout the projects.

While many participants were paid for their work or generated income through small business activities, it was apparent that the importance of income went well beyond the actual value of the cash. For many of the participants it also had important symbolic value as an indicator that others valued their work.

One young man was supplying fluffy stools for the Kulcha Shift shop. They were a huge success and the workers noticed that his self-esteem, motivation and confidence increased enormously when he felt that his work was valued and appreciated. He then thought about raising the price of the stools!

(Kulcha Shift)

Similarly, in the Changing Lanes Project, young people learned that they had skills and abilities that were wanted and appreciated and this contributed significantly to their self-esteem and feelings of self-worth.

Young people have been engaged in work in a mechanical engineering workshop and have been paid for their work. They are valued for their contribution and for the quality of their work. Participants are acutely aware of this and are justifiably proud of their work.

(Changing Lanes)

It was apparent that the value assigned to productive activity contributed to the projects' success in addressing negative stereotyping and stigmatisation of young people at the community level, with a number of projects serving as vehicles for promoting the strengths, skills and contributions of local young people to the wider community. Evidence from the evaluation suggests that this not only had a positive impact on young people's self image and sense of belonging but also boosted their opportunities for economic participation. This was illustrated in Warrnambool where local businesses are now approaching young people through Kulcha Shift to undertake small design projects. These aspects of the projects were particularly important to young people who had previously been marginalised by factors such as race, sexual orientation or mental illness, or who were seeking to break from histories of offending or poor attendance in employment and education.

Education, training and workplace settings are also important sites for young people to form natural social connections with their peers, project staff and other adults. Many of the young people commented that they valued the opportunity to build relationships with others and that they had benefited from the mutual support these provided.

Through their participation in the projects, young people were also connected with a broader social network and useful resources. As well as enhancing their social support and sense of connection to others, in many cases this also helped to build their capacity for economic participation by, for example, being linked with job opportunities, mentors and services providing information about vocational options.

The capacity to exercise control over one's life and having a sense of a future are powerful determinants of mental health and wellbeing for young people. The projects demonstrate that participation in economic activity can play a role in supporting young people to foster these attributes. This was most obviously evident for those who earned income through their participation. This placed them in a better position to improve their life situation through, for example, having access to better housing and food or being able to participate in social and recreational activities. As relatively small-scale initiatives, not all of the projects were able to offer participants permanent full-time jobs or to establish businesses as going concerns. Nevertheless, the fact that they enabled participants to break into or re-enter training or employment was experienced by many as a positive step toward regaining control over their lives and their futures.

In all these areas, the projects worked to enhance links within communities and to build connections between young people and the economic and social infrastructure. In doing so, the projects worked at multiple levels, using processes from individual support and training to community development and change.

The interactive and non-linear nature of this work was explicitly reported in one of the project evaluation reports:

The creative projects and milestones have had a snowball effect, whereby the general opinion of young people is lifted, so their mental health and wellbeing is evident, then Artspace is seen as a contributing positive factor and is attractive to young people, and so more young people get involved in bigger and better projects.

(Artspace)

These projects were clearly successful in supporting young people to acquire or strengthen skills that are transferable to other aspects of their lives and in achieving tangible improvements in attributes understood to be linked to mental health and wellbeing. Traditionally, mental health and social support agencies have worked to build these skills using individual or group based interventions in case work or therapeutic settings. These projects demonstrate that it is not only eminently possible to achieve positive outcomes by fostering participation in economic activity, but also that this can be done in a way which is non-stigmatising and which confers the additional benefits of enhancing young people's capacity for economic participation.

Learnings

- At the **individual** level, economic development projects have the potential to improve young people’s capacity for economic participation by improving skills and knowledge (including knowledge of options), fostering positive changes in attitudes toward employment and providing support to gain and maintain employment.
- Involvement in economic activity has the potential to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people by providing opportunities for social connection, increasing confidence and self-esteem, enhancing control over their immediate life situation and future, and providing a sense of meaning and purpose.
- Many of the skills and attributes developed by young people through their involvement in economic development projects are transferable to other economic activities as well as to other aspects of their lives, including those related to their mental health and wellbeing.
- At the **organisational** level, projects using economic development as a vehicle for promoting mental health have the potential to:
 - increase integration of concern for economic participation and mental health issues into the core business of agencies, including an increased preparedness to employ young people to undertake work on behalf of the agency;
 - augment organisational capacity to assist young people to access economic activities such as education and work, and build referral networks between organisations working with young people; and
 - enhance understanding of mental health issues.
- At the **community** level, projects using economic development as a vehicle for promoting mental health have the potential to:
 - enhance understanding of mental health and wellbeing and the links between mental health and economic participation;
 - foster awareness of the strengths of young people in the wider community and acceptance of those from diverse backgrounds; and
 - lead to improved attitudes towards employment of young people and increased acceptance of diverse ways of fostering economic participation.

Nevertheless, positive changes at the community level are generally more difficult to achieve in a limited timeframe.

- The effectiveness of economic development activity in promoting mental health and wellbeing and in achieving positive community and organisational change appears to be due to the value assigned to economic participation by young people and the wider society and its central role in other aspects of young people’s lives.

Outcomes for organisations

Building organisational capacity to support young people's economic participation

The evaluation found that building organisational capacity for economic participation was the most successful outcome of these projects. Participating agencies reported that:

- There was an increased awareness of the benefits of economic participation for young people's mental health and wellbeing and an increased preparedness to involve young people in decision-making. In several projects this extended to agencies employing young people to undertake agency tasks rather than contracting established businesses in the community.
- Economic participation became increasingly regarded as part of the core business of organisations. For example, Brophy Family and Youth Services, which had historically had a focus on counselling and casework interventions, reported significant shifts in agency culture. As the project developed project staff took opportunities to explain the links between economic participation and mental health to agency staff. This had a positive effect, with staff becoming increasingly more likely to adopt or utilise economic and community participation as strategies for assisting their clients. There was also an increasing willingness at Brophy to work collaboratively with other agencies:

The project has had a very positive impact, with more agency staff referring young people and finding ways to work in a collaborative manner for the benefits of clients. For example, a collaborative documentary is being made with clients and staff from Kulcha Shift and JPET.

(Kulcha Shift staff member)

- The projects resulted in an enhanced resource base for assisting young people to participate in economic activity. One of the tangible outcomes of the Kulcha Shift project was a database established for registering young people's IT skills and promoting them to local businesses, community groups and workplaces.
- Links and referral pathways between agencies significantly improved, in particular pathways between social welfare agencies and those supporting young people's participation in education, training and employment.

Building organisational capacity to promote young people's mental health and wellbeing

Participating organisations reported that as a result of the projects mental health issues were more likely to be accepted as a significant part of the organisation's work. Staff began to see the mental health benefits of the activities they offered.

Many of the young people come into Kulcha Shift as isolated young people. Through being involved at Kulcha Shift they link up with a group, friendships develop and so does their social connectedness.

(Kulcha Shift)

An increased understanding of mental health issues, in particular mental health literacy, and an increased awareness of and sensitivity to the issues associated with mental health and wellbeing was apparent in those organisations which were involved in the projects.

We have a better understanding of youth mental health issues—enhanced mental health literacy and an awareness of it being our responsibility (not someone else's).

(Changing Lanes)

This increased understanding was reflected in changed organisational practices. For example, Artspace has put procedures in place for referring young people requiring more intensive mental health and social support and has engaged two primary health care workers on its committee of management.

Importantly, in a number of projects there was evidence of an enhanced capacity to articulate the connection between mental health and economic participation.

Finally, several projects reported that they had improved their ability to address mental health issues through partnerships. This was illustrated in the ongoing alliance between Artspace and Aspire, which enables mental health issues to be addressed through arts-based activities.

partnerships

Outcomes for communities

Enhancing community capacity to promote young people's economic participation

The impact of the projects on communities was less clear and consistent. Some projects reported evidence of change. For example:

There is improved cooperation and an enhanced view of community responsibility for the issues. This ... is apparent in the requests for work to be done (from local businesses and organisations). These groups, particularly business houses, provide work and support that is not always openly financial but certainly positive towards the participants and staff.

(Kulcha Shift)

All projects reported improved or continued positive attitudes towards employment of young people within their community and an increased willingness to employ young people. For example, many local businesses employed young people participating in the Artspace project to design fliers and make posters. This project also reported a shift in community attitudes toward those young people choosing to remain in the area and seek employment there. Whereas in the past considerable stigma had been associated with this choice, it was now seen as a positive if not better pathway.

While some projects reported that there continued to be a poor understanding of the value of economic enterprises in the community, others reported a higher level of local support, particularly for young people's involvement in these activities:

Kulcha Shift has established itself within the community as an effective pathway for local young people to become engaged in economic activity and has received enormous community support for this role which is evidenced by the strong support of the Kulcha Shift retail outlet.

(Kulcha Shift)

The Business Ideas Group (BIG) was formed in Yarram. This is a voluntary group of interested community members who are committed to ensuring a role for young people in their community. They met regularly to discuss business ideas and ways forward—to help plan the first stage of a business that would engage young people in the community. One member said that in the past he had been involved with training programs that had helped people gain confidence and skills and they had now gone into employment. He saw the possibility for positive outcomes for young people.

(Yarram)

Several projects reported continuing suspicion of change and particularly of the diverse ways in which the projects attempted to encourage economic participation; others reported a growing culture of innovation.

The Warrnambool community has an attitude that encourages economic participation from the public and this is evidenced by the small business incubator managed by the local Council.

(Kulcha Shift)

Despite the positive changes, there was a consensus among the projects that changes at the community level are more difficult to bring about, discern or measure in a short timeframe.

Enhancing community capacity to promote young people's mental health and wellbeing

Each project reported an increased awareness and understanding of mental health issues within the community, particularly of the language used to talk about the connection between mental health and economic participation:

The community has better understanding of and is less judgemental about mental health issues.

(Changing Lanes)

There has been a raised awareness within the community of the issues around young people, economic participation, wellbeing (including mental health) and community connectedness and responsibility. It would also be fair to say that these issues are yet to make a broad and lasting impact.

(Yarram)

The evidence relating to community attitudes towards diversity was mixed. Some projects reported positive changes in community practices, including the development of more positive images of young people within the community.

The local secondary college reported that students had improved self-esteem when they returned to school once they have been at Changing Lanes. The college has found that the young people can see a purpose in school now and that they begin to develop a vision for where they may go after school. In the beginning, students were placed in the course with little consultation, but they found that some dropped out because of this, so the school changed the way that they consulted with the students to make sure they were committed before starting the program.

(Changing Lanes)

At the beginning of the project, the local media viewed mental health as mental illness. There has been a changing perception that sees the media picking up positive aspects and images of the young people and the projects.

(Evaluation consultant)

YEP has been a positive experience for the majority of people involved. It has provided a vehicle for the raising and discussion of issues around young people and their place in the community that would not have occurred without the project.

(Yarram)

At the same time there were indications that changes in community attitudes in terms of their willingness to accept people who are different or who have different needs remained a significant challenge.

The public are often slow to accept new ideas and ways of doing things in the city. However the strong support for the Kulcha Shift retail outlet has demonstrated that the community are beginning to accept a certain amount of diversity. As the community becomes more exposed to diversity it will more open to accepting...differences..., but this is something that will require time.

(Kulcha Shift)

Importantly, there appeared to be a general improvement in the appreciation of young people's capacities.

Young people in the Shire identified through the community consultation process that they felt their work and effort in the community was not acknowledged and that they did not feel valued by the community. Through activities at Artspace and by young people's involvement in the youth committee and the Shire, there has been a change in perception of the young people by the community. Young people now feel that the community acknowledges their role and work in the community. Councillors from the Shire made an effort to acknowledge the young people by coming to visit them at Artspace. The Shire is now moving to integrate young people into programs and also have a focus on programs involving young people.

(Artspace)

The Yarram YEP Video ... has led to a more positive and supportive view of young people.

(Yarram)

Sustainability

Sustainability can be viewed in two ways—as the continued operation of the project or its activities, or in terms of the sustainability of the changes the project sought to achieve at the individual, organisational and community levels.

Sustainability of the activities

Most of the projects were successful in securing funding from a range of sources to continue their work into 2003. For example:

- Brophy Family and Youth Services have obtained funding for the Kulcha Shift Youth Cooperative through the Office for Youth.
- Changing Lanes has, through a partnership with GEGAC, now secured funding from ATSIC.
- Artspace has secured Community Arts funding from VicHealth.
- Whitelion has been provided VicHealth funding over the next three years to scale up to become a more sustainable project.
- Yarram has received Commonwealth Family and Community Services funding for community building.

While it was not an objective of any of the projects, several also reported progress toward self-generated funding through the development of sustainable businesses and other economic initiatives. However, this generally remained some time away.

In the long-term, however, the challenge for the projects (and for funding bodies) will be to move those successful and well evaluated projects from short-term project funding to either their integration into the work of existing organisations and systems such as departmental program and purchasing frameworks or the establishment of a funded infrastructure which can drive further fund raising.

The long-term future of Changing Lanes is dependent upon some degree of external funding. Because of the nature of its work, the project could never be completely self-funding. Sourcing ongoing funding is one of the key challenges facing the Steering Committee. If the key stakeholders were able to commit to an annual contribution then there would be some guarantees into the future.

(Changing Lanes)

Sustainability of change

Changes achieved by projects can be sustained by:

- setting up processes for young people that they will continue to benefit from (e.g. skills development);
- setting up avenues for participants as well as other young people to continue accessing support;
- building organisational changes into policy and practices through regulations or ongoing procedures; and
- bringing about shifts in community attitudes and practices and creating connections that did not previously exist.

Individual change

There was strong evidence that the projects had achieved sustainable changes among individuals and organisations and to lesser extent communities. At the individual level, young people developed generic skills, confidence and self-esteem that were transferable to other parts of their lives. Examples of this included young people gaining other paid and unpaid employment and becoming involved in community decision-making.

Young people have already begun to receive paid projects, engagements and briefs that will lead to further enterprise-based projects.

(Artspace)

At Kulcha Shift, skills learnt through the retail outlet enhance the possibility of sustainability. The young people supplying the shop already have their own small business making goods to supply to the shop. From their involvement in the retailing side they learn customer relations and visual merchandising.

(Kulcha shift)

Organisational change

Organisations that previously did not see the links between economic participation and mental health became more aware of the benefits and incorporated this into future planning. All organisations reported that they were operating more effectively because of the project. They had increased their profile in the community and their ability to plan strategically and to develop alliances and links. In many cases, involvement in the project led to a greater preparedness to initiate or be involved in further initiatives.

The project has brought about significant changes in staff attitudes towards, and acceptance of, economic participation as a component of the business of the agency. This change has been made sustainable through the inclusion of Youth Enterprise in the strategic planning of the organisation, a function that informs the future direction of the agency. There have been a number of collaborative links established within the agency and a model of operation that ensures continuity. Through an education process, all staff have become more aware of the Youth Enterprise program and how it fits within the agency. The Youth Enterprise program has also been well catered for in the development of the new premises of Brophy Family and Youth Services and this will ensure that the overheads of the program are kept to a minimum, a factor that influences the continuation of the project. The co-location of Brophy Family and Youth Services and Kulcha Shift will also strengthen the relationship of the program to the remainder of the agency.

(Kulcha Shift)

Community change

The evaluation also suggests that there is greater awareness within communities of the role and value of young people, with the result that young people are more confident of being involved in community action and decision-making. At the same time, other community members are more willing to have young people involved. In addition, partnerships and connections have developed enabling other organisations to work with young people with an awareness of the role of economic participation in mental health.

Learnings

- There is a legitimate place for short-term projects. They can serve as a catalyst for change at the individual, organisational and community levels and build agency capacity to seek and utilise funding to extend mental health promotion activity.
- Adequate time and resources are needed to achieve and sustain the changes needed to build organisational and community capacity to promote mental health and wellbeing, suggesting that longer-term project activity needs to be supported alongside short-term initiatives.

Establishing partnerships to promote young people's mental health

Why partnerships?

The Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002 places strong emphasis on partnerships as an important mechanism for building and sustaining capacity in mental health promotion (see box). In the application process, agencies were asked to design their projects in ways that linked a number of agencies. The potential of the project to forge meaningful collaborations with other agencies, particularly between those from different sectors, was one of the selection criteria and the importance of partnerships was reiterated in each contract.

The role of partnerships in mental health promotion

Collaborative partnerships:

- can help to broaden the resource base and expertise available to a project;
- are a way of fostering involvement from many sectors in mental health promotion;
- can help to increase project impact within participating agencies by bringing a broader range of agencies into the net;
- can contribute to the sustainability of the initiative because there will be a greater number of agencies that understand and are committed to it;
- provide a forum for addressing conflicts that potentially exist between services by bringing them out into the open; and
- lead to a more seamless and coherent service system for members of the community.

An impressive range of partnerships were formed through these projects. Evidence from the evaluation suggests that these partnerships contributed substantially to the impact and sustainability of the projects.

Broadening the expertise and resource base available to projects

Partnerships were a significant factor in broadening the expertise and resource base in a number of the projects. In some, partnership took the form of joint project activity. For example, the Cobden District Health Service (CDHS) worked collaboratively with the Artspace project on a range of activities including the Futures Vision Summit, a Drug and Alcohol Working Committee and a Youth Health Forum.

Partner agencies also contributed specific expertise. For example, in the Kulcha Shift project a documentary was produced to celebrate the strengths of local young people. The involvement of the JPET worker, who had extensive skills in group work with young people, ensured that young people were more effectively engaged in this initiative. At the same time, JPET clients used the meeting space at Kulcha Shift for training and group work provided by the JPET worker. One of these activities was an art class where the participants produced work that was subsequently sold in the retail outlet.

Fostering intersectoral action in mental health promotion

Partnerships were particularly important in these projects, given that they were seeking to achieve outcomes in the areas of economic participation and mental health, and community and organisational development. These activities require a range of expertise and resources that is seldom available within one agency. In particular, many of the lead agencies were from the health and community services sector and had limited expertise in economic participation.

For example, in the Artspace project the partnership with the Corangamite Development Board allowed the project to access business knowledge and guidance as well as information on funding options. Kulcha Shift worked in a similar fashion with the Economic Development Unit at the Warrnambool City Council. Council's events manager, meanwhile, provided mentoring and guidance to young people involved in staging major community events as one of the business initiatives.

The partnership with employers was critical to the success of the Whitelion project. Most of the employment placement positions in companies were endorsed and supported by the company CEO, while relationships with the person responsible for the management of the young person were essential for day-to-day matters.

Some of the projects worked closely with training institutions, enabling training options to be developed for young people. This was illustrated in the Yarram project's partnership with the outreach campus of the East Gippsland Institute of TAFE.

Through partnerships the projects were also able to ensure that information about mental health and wellbeing was made available to young people and the wider community. For example, in the Artspace project the Primary Health Care and Health Promotion Unit of the Terang-Mortlake Health Service (TMHS) provided information, awareness and education materials for distribution through Artspace activities. Similarly, several community arts events were staged through the events management component of the Kulcha Shift project which aimed to raise awareness about mental health among local young people and in the wider community. These were made possible by a partnership with Aspire, a service working with young people with mental health issues.

intersectoral

Enhancing project impact by bringing a broader range of agencies into the net

An impressive range of partners was involved in the projects, many of whom may not normally have worked with young people or on economic development or mental health issues.

Importantly, engaging a wider range of agencies also meant that the reach of the projects was widened, with partners facilitating links with their broader constituencies. This was particularly well illustrated in the partnership between Artspace and the Corangamite Shire Council. This provided the Council with an immediate link between local young people (through projects such as the radio booth, Corefest and Freeza) and the objectives identified in the Council's Arts and Cultural Strategy.

The partnership between Artspace and the local Shire of Corangamite works at a number of levels: Artspace and the Youth Committee are able to provide advice to the Council to help it plan its strategies in regard to young people; Artspace is able to fulfil the strategies that the Council has in place in regard to having a display area for art and young people participating in music, art and drama—both part of the Arts and Cultural Strategy of the Shire.

(Artspace)

Similarly, the worker at the Cobden Health Centre (another project partner) promoted Artspace activities, particularly through the Cobden Technical School where she is based, and linked the project with established networks of health workers in the district.

Partnerships were particularly important for working with young people who might otherwise have been difficult to reach. For example, through its partnership with Aspire, Kulcha Shift was successful in engaging young people with mental health issues in selling poetry, artwork and other products through its retail outlet.

Contributing to project sustainability

The formation of partnerships contributed to sustainability primarily by involving agencies with knowledge about and expertise in seeking further funding. This was illustrated in the roles of the Terang-Mortlake Community Health Services' Primary Health Care and Health Promotion Unit and the Corangamite Development Board in the Artspace project.

Partnerships also provided a focus for improving referral protocols between agencies and increasing the preparedness of workers to work in a collaborative manner to better meet the needs of clients.

In a number of projects the involvement of agencies contributed to sustained changes in awareness of and responses to young people's concerns. The Kulcha Shift project reported that the involvement of youth and economic development officers from Warrnambool City Council meant that learning from the project could be fed into policy and action in Council's youth and economic development activities.

Providing a forum for resolving differences

The value of partnerships in resolving differences between agencies and between them and communities was particularly evident in the partnership between Changing Lanes and the GEGAC.

There are strong relationships with GEGAC who provide vehicles to be worked on and pay for the work to be done. At the start there was some concern from Koori students that the program was on a school site. This concern has been overcome through experience of the students attending the program.

In the local partnerships there was also initially some distrust that the host organisation might take over. But through many meetings and through the experience of students being referred by a number of agencies, it is now seen that one agency does not dominate.

(Changing Lanes)

In the Whitelion project it became apparent that placements were more likely to be successful if there was a positive partnership between agencies connected to the young person. Partnerships enabled information to be shared between Whitelion and housing services, drug and alcohol counselling agencies, general counsellors, Juvenile Justice officers and other organisations linked to young people. Working in partnership ensured that the young person received consistent messages and support from all those around them. Problems faced by the young person could also be resolved more quickly when they were tackled or shared among agencies.

Jane D was released but was still engaged with Parkville staff in outreach (CROP). She was getting to work late, and her employer had expressed their unhappiness. Her Whitelion worker asked her CROP worker for assistance. CROP nightshift staff began to give Jane wake up phone calls so she could get to work on time. (Whitelion)

Fostering a more seamless and coherent service delivery system

In a number of the projects partnerships between agencies enabled them to deliver a more seamless and coherent service to participants. This was illustrated in the partnership between Kulcha Shift and JPET.

A particularly successful outcome for the partnership between Kulcha Shift and JPET is a young woman who left school during Year 10 with significant self-esteem issues that prevented her considering employment or even other study opportunities. She took part in the retail training program and volunteered in the retail outlet, an activity she showed a real aptitude for and thoroughly enjoyed. We began to notice significant positive changes in her appearance and manner and, after about one month at Kulcha Shift, she was successful at gaining full time employment in retail.

(Kulcha Shift)

The project also worked with the Job Pathways Program (JPP) to develop a flexible and sustainable way of working together to meet the needs of clients involved in both programs. The job seeking and job preparation training offered by JPP complemented the retail training and experience offered at Kulcha Shift. Young people were able to prepare for employment with a resume and interview skills with assistance from JPP and gain practical skills and experience to improve their job prospects at Kulcha Shift.

Through a partnership between Kulcha Shift retail outlet and JPP, a program has been developed jointly in which young women aged 15–16 years who have left school will be part of an accredited retail trainee program conducted at the Kulcha Shift retail outlet. They will receive a Certificate I in Work Preparation and work at the shop for half a day a week for six weeks.

(Kulcha Shift)

Kulcha Shift also built on JPP's work with young people in developing their resumes, enabling them to put them into CD format, thereby increasing young people's competitive advantage in the job seeking process.

Similarly, through the partnership with Community Corrections young people with offending histories were offered the opportunity to complete their Community Based Orders with Kulcha Shift and to continue their involvement with the project. This enabled young offenders to develop a positive social network and to become involved in the community in a meaningful way.

Partnerships were similarly critical to providing a more coherent approach in the Whitelion project.

The project has enabled more effective operation of the program. Program coordinators are now able to visit the PYRC units regularly and speak with young women in person rather than just leave brochures. As a result, there are increasing numbers of placements and employers and increasing effectiveness of the work.

(Whitelion)

Enhancing partnerships

Himmelman (2001) identifies four different types of partnerships on a continuum from networking through to collaboration (see box).

<i>Types of partnerships in health promotion</i>	
<i>Partnership type</i>	<i>Purpose and nature</i>
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formed to exchange information for mutual benefit • Requires little time and trust between partners
Coordinating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formed to exchange information and alter activities for a common purpose
Cooperating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formed to exchange information, alter activities and share resources • Involves a significant amount of time, a high level of trust between partners and sharing of 'turf' between agencies
Collaborating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formed to increase the capacity of partners for mutual benefit and a common purpose • Requires partners to give up a part of their turf to another agency to create a better or more seamless service system

Adapted from: Himmelman A 2001, 'On coalitions and the transformation of power relations: Collaborative betterment and collaborative empowerment', *American Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 29, no. 2.

A range of partnership models were represented in these projects. **Networking** was a strong feature of the Whitelion project where information was shared between the project and housing, drug and alcohol and counselling agencies; Juvenile Justice; and others involved with participants. This ensured that young people got consistent messages from those working with them. **Coordination** occurred when the project worked with the Job Pathways Program to build on their job seeking and job preparation training by offering young people retail training and experience at Kulcha Shift. **Cooperation** was evident in the Kulcha Shift program where JPET clients used the meeting space at Kulcha Shift to engage in training or group work with the JPET worker. **Collaboration** was illustrated in the Artspace project in which each of the partner agencies played a significant role in delivering the project.

Partnerships have been a key feature of all of the schemes funded under the VicHealth Mental Health Plan 1999–2002. The outcomes of the Youth Economic Participation for Mental Health and Wellbeing Projects are not dissimilar to those found in evaluations of the earlier schemes. Specifically, the indications are that projects achieving a high level of impact and success in working toward sustainability tend to be those in which the partnerships:

- have a clear purpose;
- are planned and fostered throughout the project;
- are formalised; and
- are supported by senior management.

The experience of this scheme also suggests that successful partnerships not only have a clear purpose overall but also set themselves goals and activities that are achievable, realistic and outcome or results focused. Partnership activities that were particularly successful in this regard involved:

- mentoring;
- shared use of space;
- facilitating the access of other agencies to young people and young people's access to decision-making through or in those agencies (such as was the case in the partnership with the council in the Artspace project);
- immediate and mutual gains (for example, the employer breakfasts offered as part of the Whitelion project resulted in new employer mentors and provision of employment placements); and/or
- developing worker's capacity or understanding, through, for example, shared training.

Clearly, where a partnership is established for the purposes of sharing information only informal or semiformal procedures will be necessary. However, when more sophisticated types of collaboration are involved, such as joint planning or shared funding, there is a need for more formal procedures such as a memorandum of understanding between partners which outlines expectations or tasks, joint planning procedures and arrangements for the sharing of resources. These procedures enable partners to develop a common understanding and purpose, foster interdependent relationships, engage the expertise of participating agencies and plan for the sustainability of the initiative.

The experience of the Youth Economic Participation for Mental Health and Wellbeing Scheme indicates that attention to partnership development is particularly important in initiatives seeking to promote mental health through economic participation. Agencies are often engaged in such partnerships for their specific expertise and resources but may have to direct more effort towards identification of a sufficiently common focus or purpose to plan effectively together.

While overall the projects reported positively on partnerships, several projects reported that they had learned to be more cautious about working with organisations or personnel with divergent agendas as this risked compromising the focus and momentum of the project.

In the course of the projects VicHealth commissioned some further work on a tool to support agencies to develop a clearer understanding of the range of purposes in partnership to take a more planned and strategic approach to selecting partners and to maximise the contribution they could make at different times in the life of a project. This 'Partnership Analysis Tool' is available from the VicHealth website at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au.

Learnings

- Partnerships can contribute to the success of projects by broadening the resource and expertise base, fostering intersectoral involvement, increasing project impact and reach, contributing to sustainability, providing a forum for addressing conflicts and leading to a more coherent service system.
- Partnerships are particularly important in initiatives designed to promote young people's mental health through economic participation given that expertise and resources will be required from community, health and employment sector agencies.
- In general, partnerships are more likely to be successful if they have a clear purpose, are planned and fostered as the project develops, are formalised and have the support of senior agency management. This suggests the importance of funding bodies and practitioners placing continued emphasis on partnership development after the proposal development stage.
- Partnerships are more likely to be successful when their activities and goals are realistic, achievable and outcome focused.
- When programs are of an innovative nature and involve agencies from different sectors particular attention to the selection of partners and the formation of partnership arrangements is required.

Good practices in economic participation and mental health promotion

In the evaluation of the projects VicHealth was keen to learn about specific approaches, practices and models that were effective in promoting economic participation and mental health and wellbeing among young people. A number of key themes emerge as discussed below.

Promote activities that are purposeful to young people and communities

As indicated earlier, many of the benefits, particularly the mental health benefits of economic participation, derived from more than the fact that young people earned an income. Benefits were also related to young people's sense of value, of being valued and of having opportunities to connect with one another.

It is apparent that while financial gain is the reason for the involvement of some young people, the majority are driven by the opportunity to be part of a social group and a structure that is having a positive impact on the community.

(Kulcha Shift)

Also important were participant's perceptions of the value of the skills they learned through the projects:

It is important that regardless of the activity undertaken the participants must view it as having value and being important in their lives. Participants who dedicate a lot of time to a project can be rewarded by being part of something that has value for the community and by learning skills that will be valuable to them beyond the life of the project. I learn very practical things to do that might get me a good job.

(Changing Lanes project officer and participant)

This is not to suggest that remuneration is unimportant, since, as indicated in the Changing Lanes experience, it is a critical way to value young people's contribution.

I like what we do ... it's real work and we do a good job ... and we get paid.

(Changing Lanes participant)

The purposefulness of activities is also important for practical reasons, with young people being more readily able to practise skills that can be readily integrated into their lives.

The program is practical and not based on books, lectures and assignments. Participants are required to complete tasks involving literacy and numeracy skills, such as reading repair manuals, ordering parts and measuring materials for manufacture. Literacy and numeracy learning and practical skills development happens incidentally as the need arises.

(Changing Lanes)

The projects also learned that it was important to communicate the meaning and value of activities to young people. For example, rather than giving a young person an ongoing employment position, as was done in the beginning, Whitelion found much more rewarding results if the young person attended an interview and felt as if they earned the job.

A mindset began to develop that young people participating in a Whitelion employment position would be tolerated for just about anything they did and the position would still be there for them. The project learned to be firmer with the young people and to treat them in a way which reflected expectations in the mainstream workforce. It encouraged employers to send out warning notices on several occasions. The project also began calling the positions ‘an experience of work’. The positions were promoted as paid casual or part-time for the first month and were reassessed before being extended. This resulted in young people knowing that their attitude and performance at work was important every day:

*Whitelion gave **Jane L** an opportunity to work at the zoo upon her release from custody. Jane attended once and then failed to show up again. Jane for some time expected the job to still be there when she decided to return. This was not the case—the opportunity was lost. After many months she called and left messages several times before our CEO decided to return her call. She stated that she had changed and was ready to work. The young woman was asked to come in on a weekly basis to do unpaid work experience for Whitelion. This was to ensure her commitment before placing her with another employer. After a period of time a placement came up for paid experience at work for a company and she was placed there for one month on a trial basis. She completed the month with great efficiency and commitment and was offered another month. After the second month she had impressed the employers to the degree that she was offered full time on a casual basis for six months and is still going extremely well.*

Learnings

- Economic activities that are purposeful and have meaning and value for young people and the community are more effective in enhancing young people’s mental health and their capacity for economic participation.
- Remunerating project participants is an important way of affirming the value, worth and purpose of young people’s contributions.
- Young people tend to more readily integrate the skills acquired through economic activities if the activities are practical and purposeful.
- Communicating reasonable and firm expectations to young people participating in economic activity regarding their attendance, behavior and performance can help to convey the value and meaning of those activities.

Work in partnership with young people

The benefits of partnerships between agencies were discussed at length earlier. The evaluation indicates that working in a collaborative and respectful fashion with young people themselves is of equal importance.

Changing Lanes is not seen as a 'yet another program' to sort them out: most participants have been 'programmed' at one time or another. Rather, the workshop is a non-threatening, relaxed environment where the participants are encouraged to 'own' the project they are working on. There is no judgement of participant background, 'history', 'what has happened in the past', etc. Whilst the details may be part of the referral, they do not enter the workshop. The instructor is directing, non-threatening, has a great sense of humour and shows great respect to the participants. Within the workshop there is an air of respect for the instructor, for the participants, for the equipment and the environment. For many of these youngsters, respect of an adult towards them is something new. When it becomes obvious that this is genuine, the respect grows accordingly.

(Changing Lanes)

This approach is especially important for young people who have experienced prolonged marginalisation as a result of factors such as unemployment or socioeconomic disadvantage.

A number of practices were identified as being particularly important in this regard, including:

- flexible decision-making processes;
- being respectful and non-judgemental of young people;
- accepting young people for who they are without stigma and without regard for their past; and
- investment in the development of relationships between young people and project staff.

As well as being important for mental health, these practices also contributed to the success of the projects themselves. The collective experience of the projects was that when young people feel valued they are more likely to develop a sense of ownership and investment in the project and the learning process.

It doesn't matter if I am not very good at Maths and English...Peg treats me like a friend. I know I am not going to get kicked out of class because I was talking. The grown ups don't yell at me. I get to do good things I like and the people are friendly. Mum says it's the only day she can get me out of bed.

(Changing Lanes)

Learnings

- Mental health and economic participation benefits can be maximised through project processes that convey respect for young people and provide opportunities for them to develop supportive relationships with project staff.

Involve young people in decision-making

Both formal and informal ways of fostering young people's participation were promoted in these projects. A number of projects engaged young people in formal decision-making processes such as an advisory group or management committee. Others promoted participation more informally, for example by encouraging young people to provide comments and input or by delegating responsibility for particular aspects of the project. For example, in the Shuvit Skate and Music Festival in Warrnambool, young people were responsible for selecting all the entertainment and activities to be provided on the day

Participation was also fostered informally by giving young people control over individual decision-making, such as whether or not to attend project activities.

Young people make important decisions within Changing Lanes, in the most direct and basic ways—about whether to participate at all, to come to work or not—through negotiation and completion of jobs undertaken, through work related problem-solving, and about the set-up and operation of the workshop. They are directly responsible for the completion of work.

(Changing Lanes)

Several projects noted that project management imperatives often worked against young people's participation in formal decision-making processes, with agency staff needing to assume final responsibility.

The organisation operates in an open and collaborative manner ... However, the final decision-making for the project itself is by project management and staff in accordance with funding guidelines.

(Kulcha Shift)

A survey completed by participants in the Whitelion project before and after their work placements demonstrates the effectiveness of fostering participatory approaches to program delivery. The survey indicated that there was a 67% increase in the number of young people reporting that they made decisions about what they did at work and a 24% increase in the number agreeing that they contributed to decisions about what happened at work. Importantly, these changes were also reflected in participant's self reports about decision-making in their lives more broadly. For example, there was a 15% increase in the number of respondents agreeing that they had a say about what happens in their lives and an 11% increase in the number concurring that they had the primary say in determining what happened to them.

A number of projects reported other positive mental health outcomes of a participatory approach, principally through increased feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy and of participants feeling more confident to express their wishes and share their ideas with others.

Young people's participation was also thought to be a factor in the success of the projects. That is, activities tended to be more successful if young people were involved in their planning and implementation.

Importantly, the commitments to participation led to changes in the wider organisation and the communities within which the projects were located. For example, in the course of the Artspace project, Corangamite Council committed to establishing a Youth Council and a Youth Leadership Program in its Youth Policy.

Learnings

- Involving young people in decision-making in projects can contribute to improved self-esteem and confidence, thereby enhancing young people's mental health. Many of the skills learned are transferable to other decision-making forums as well as to other areas of young people's lives.
- Involving young people in decision-making can also model the importance and effectiveness of this practice to others, leading to change in other organisations and in the community.

participation

Accept diversity and promote inclusion

All the projects sought to include a diverse range of young people and to promote the acceptance of diversity as a positive ethic and practice at the project, organisational and community levels. This approach was emphasised both for its potential to involve those most likely to be affected by social exclusion and to create organisational and community cultures in which young people could more readily form connections with community networks and economic institutions

Most of the projects were successful in achieving—if not positively celebrating—diversity in the projects themselves.

The projects also described cultures of inclusiveness within the partner organisations and demonstrated the practices and procedures in place to ensure that these were maintained.

The project involves a wide range of characters from all sectors of East Gippsland society—disabled, Indigenous, non-Indigenous, professionals, tradespeople, young and old and unemployed, off the tracks and just on.

(Changing Lanes)

Learnings

- Promoting diversity at the project, community and organisational levels can help to ensure the inclusion of those most affected by economic and social marginalisation and create organisational and community cultures in which young people can more readily make social connections and access economic resources.

inclusion

Take time and pace change

A common theme emerging from the projects was the time it takes to establish effective economic participation projects. Several commented that they had underestimated the time involved in establishing links and building trust and familiarity with the project. This was particularly the case given that the projects were of an innovative nature.

The pace of change was also found to be important when working with young people.

Some companies maybe naïvely have given too much responsibility and trust to a young person very soon in their placement. This is sometimes because of monetary or budgetary issues, requiring the young person to fill a position in a team as any 'normal' employee.

(Whitelion)

Jane J started her placement with only the CEO and one other person in the company with any knowledge of Whitelion or Jane's drug issues and offending background. The anonymity this gave her was what she required to get a fresh start, without preconceived ideas and prejudices that she had encountered in the past when trying to do this in the country town in which she previously lived. She was given a full-time roster which most of the young people would struggle greatly with but she rose to the challenge. Her CEO states that 'she came in very shy and insecure, she's developed and blossomed and she's very popular. She's very conscientious about learning and very talented, and to see the difference she has made over the last three or four or five months is very gratifying'.

Learnings

- Economic development projects and their application in mental health promotion are of an experimental, risky and innovative nature and are critically dependent on the establishment of partnerships. The time taken to build familiarity and trust in projects and links with key partners needs to be taken into account in project funding and resourcing.

Models of effective operation

The success of the projects was due in large part to the fact that they worked at a number of levels within their communities. They did not concentrate solely upon the needs of the young people, though they addressed these. They did not concentrate solely on developing community and organisational structures, though they recognised the importance of this. Rather, they work at both levels—and all levels in between.

Specifically, they worked with **young people** to:

- develop their skill portfolios (specific and generic);
- provide and support their work experience;
- support and publicise practical examples of successful economic participation; and
- develop contacts that will continue to link young people into existing and new economic and social networks.

At the same time they worked with **organisations** and **communities** to:

- develop overall awareness of young people's needs and capabilities, and of the issues around economic participation and mental health;
- build awareness of community responsibilities in these areas;
- establish and support appropriate networks that link young people and their communities;
- change attitudes towards acceptance of diversity and participation; and
- resource young people's access to opportunities.

Several studies (see Patton 2001; Stokes, Wierenga & Wyn 2003) emphasise the importance of 'skill portfolios' for young people to manage and balance the different aspects of their lives. These programs enhance the development of specific economic related skills as well as generic skills that can be applied in other aspects of young people's lives. Through their involvement in the projects, young people were able to develop their portfolio of skills which they were then able to use for present and future employment options and life choices.

Such an approach, however, if carried out in isolation from broader community development, can lead to a focus on young people's deficits. Even the language used to describe the work of the projects is important.

If the project uses welfare language in the community then that is how it will be perceived. We need to be careful that we are talking about creating community through the enterprising capacity of the young people and not about the 'problems 'of the young people and 'fixing them up'. In this way art and retail based programs have a positive empowerment agenda. They link well with a mental health promotion focus rather than focusing on the negative characteristics of the young people that 'need to be changed'.

(Kulcha Shift)

Some projects struggled with these issues both conceptually and in their daily operation. Some articulated lists of individual and family deficits that 'explained' a lack of economic participation; others took a broad structuralist approach that rejected any focus on individual needs and skills. The evaluation findings, however, suggest that it is important to address both these areas. There is less value in providing skills and experience for young people if there is no change in communities' willingness to support their economic participation, or if stereotyping and stigma continue to discriminate and exclude them. Projects are likely to be battling for young people, case by case, unless they are also working strategically to change structures and attitudes through community development.

There is also limited value in addressing issues exclusively via a community development process, since this fails to recognise the support that young people may need to develop their skills and confidence so they can take advantage of opportunities created. Projects are likely to create structural change without recognising the impact of prior exclusion on the capacity of young people to make connections.

In other words, issues of economic participation and mental health are intertwined, as are issues of individual needs and structural responses.

The successful projects explicitly saw their work as encompassing the enhancement of both economic participation and mental health. They may have chosen to work, in this program, on practical measures around economic participation but they also saw their role as having an explicit focus on the health and wellbeing of participants.

Each of the projects recognised that unless they addressed issues of confidence, self-worth and resilience within any population—but particularly a population that has been excluded from success—these mental health issues would present as continuing barriers to successful economic participation.

This suggests that if economic participation projects are to achieve positive outcomes in both economic participation and mental health and wellbeing they need to address the a number of areas, as shown in the table below.

	<i>Economic participation</i>	<i>Mental health</i>
Individual young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge and skills • Supported experience • Contacts and links 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generic skills • Feelings of competence, self-worth and self-esteem • Resilience
Community development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness (knowledge) • Creation of opportunities (skills) • Attitude and responsibility • Recognition of young people's competence and contribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness and knowledge • Recognition of young people as community members • Acceptance of diversity • Decrease in community stress • Inclusion of young people in decision-making

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF KEY LEARNINGS

5



Conclusion and Summary of Key Learnings

The promotion of young people's mental health and wellbeing through economic participation is an important yet challenging and complex priority area identified in VicHealth's Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999-2002. It is also a long term endeavour to which the projects in the current scheme have made a significant contribution. They have done this both by yielding positive benefits for local young people, organisations and communities, as well as by generating knowledge and approaches with the potential to be applied elsewhere in Australia.

The activities involved in the projects were not necessarily new. However, consciously linking mental health and well-being concerns with activities to promote young people's economic participation, such as education, training or self employment, was. This was a challenge for the agencies since it required them to establish relationships with partners and to engage in processes that were unfamiliar to them.

The funding provided to these projects has enhanced organisation's understanding of the relationship between economic activity and mental health, enabling them to contribute to developing health promoting environments both for individual young people and for their communities.

The VicHealth Mental Health Promotion Plan provided a clear framework within which projects could be developed. It identified social connectedness, freedom from discrimination and economic participation as determinants of mental health and wellbeing. While mental health promotion may not have been the core business of the agencies funded to implement the projects, the determinants were. They were the 'hook' that made some of the complex ideas of the Plan accessible.

The evaluation suggests that the projects have had a significant impact in terms of both economic participation and mental health outcomes. This is an impact the agencies have a commitment to sustaining with each of the projects continuing either as part of agency business or with additional funding beyond the original VicHealth investment.

The challenge facing the projects in the coming 12 months, however, will be to establish processes to ensure sustainability in the longer term. VicHealth has a particular interest in exploring the processes required to achieve this and to this end has established the Youth Economic Participation for Mental Health and Wellbeing Tracking Project. The project will monitor the progress of these projects for the following 12 months to capture processes for supporting sustainability.

This project will build on the significant learnings in the current evaluation about the potential in economic participation for enhancing young people's mental health and good practices for achieving this.

The evaluation suggests that good practice in economic development and mental health is characterised by working strategically to build the capacity of *both* individual young people and of organisations and communities. Support to individual young people ensures that they are in a position to take advantage of economic participation opportunities. Working at the community level helps to create an environment in which young people are understood and supported, while shifting the culture, language and practice principles of organisations, enhances their capacity to work in an effective and sustained way with young people.

Critical to the success of the projects was that they modelled in their practice the participation of young people in decision-making and the inclusion of young people who may be marginalised from broader social and economic processes.

The projects confirm that economic activity has particular value as a focus for promoting mental health. This appears to derive from the value attached to economic activity in the eyes both of young people themselves and the wider community as well as the central role of economic institutions and processes in facilitating social connections. For this reason it is important that economic development projects offer concrete and immediate benefits for young people, including income and public recognition of their value, as well as attending to procedures to ensure that young people are engaged in social processes and supportive relationships.

In particular the projects learned that:

Economic development, economic participation and mental health

- **At the individual level**, economic development projects have the potential to improve young people's capacity for economic participation by improving skills and knowledge (including their knowledge of options), fostering positive changes in attitudes toward employment and providing support to gain and maintain employment.
- Involvement in economic activity has the potential to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people by providing opportunities for social connection, increasing confidence and self-esteem, enhancing control over their immediate life situation and future, and providing a sense of meaning and purpose.
- Many of the skills and attributes developed by young people through their involvement in economic development projects are transferable to other economic activities as well as to other aspects of their lives, including those related to their mental health and wellbeing.

- At the **organisational** level, projects using economic development as a vehicle for promoting mental health have the potential to:
 - integrate concern for economic participation and mental health issues into the core business of agencies, including an increased preparedness to employ young people to undertake work on behalf of the agency;
 - augment organisational capacity to assist young people to access economic activities such as education and work and build referral networks between organisations working with young people; and
 - enhance understanding of mental health issues.
- At the **community** level projects using economic development as a vehicle for promoting mental health have the potential to:
 - Enhance understanding of mental health and wellbeing and the links between mental health and economic participation
 - Foster awareness of the strengths of young people in the wider community and acceptance of those from diverse backgrounds;
 - Improve attitudes towards employment of young people and increased acceptance of diverse ways of fostering economic participation.

Nevertheless, positive changes at the community level are generally more difficult to achieve in a limited time frame.

- The effectiveness of economic development activity in promoting mental health and wellbeing and in achieving positive community and organisational change appears to be due to the value assigned to economic participation by young people and the wider society and its central role in other aspects of young people's lives.

Sustainability

- There is a legitimate place for short-term projects. They can serve as a catalyst for change at the individual, organisational and community levels and build agency capacity to seek and utilise funding to extend mental health promotion activity.
- Adequate time and resources are needed to achieve and sustain the changes needed to build organisational and community capacity to promote mental health and wellbeing, suggesting that longer-term project activity needs to be supported alongside short-term initiatives.

Establishing partnerships to promote young people's mental health through economic participation

- Partnerships can contribute to the success of projects by broadening the resource and expertise base, fostering intersectoral involvement, increasing project impact and reach, contributing to sustainability, providing a forum for addressing conflicts, leading to a more coherent support service system.
- They are particularly important in initiatives which are innovative and designed to promote collaboration between sectors as diverse as the youth, economic participation, health and community sectors reflected in these projects.
- Partnerships are more likely to be successful if they have a clear purpose, are planned and fostered as the project develops, are formalised and have the support of senior agency management.

Good practices in economic participation and mental health

Good practice in economic development and mental health and wellbeing is characterised by:

- working strategically to build the **capacity** of **both** individual young people and of communities;
- modelling in project practice the **participation of young people** in decision-making;
- modelling in project practice the **inclusion of diversity**;
- providing concrete and immediate **benefits for young people**, including income, as well as public recognition of their value;
- building **partnerships** at all levels, both with young people and within communities;
- providing concrete and immediate **benefits for the community** including public work, decreased stress, greater harmony; and
- consciously establishing **ongoing processes** of change and development to build sustainability.

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