



The University of Sydney

Glebe Youth Service education program for marginalised youth

A briefing paper prepared by the Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney

Background

Glebe Youth Service (GYS) is an incorporated organisation with a voluntary Management Committee. The service has been operating in Glebe for over twenty years and has a strong track record in meeting its objectives aimed at young people who are 12 to 24 years of age (inclusive), but primarily those 12 - 17 years of age (inclusive), who live in and/or attend school or frequent the suburb of Glebe and who are disadvantaged (at risk of poverty, sickness, suffering, distress, misfortune, disability or helplessness).

The Glebe Youth and Community Educational Partnership (GYCEP) was established in 2004. The program is managed by a Steering Committee which meets monthly and is composed of GYS Youth Workers, TAFE Outreach Coordinator, TAFE Adult Basic Education Head Teacher, DET Home School Liaison Officer, Aboriginal Student Liaison Officer, Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, OTEN Head Teachers, program teachers, Mentors, and Volunteers.

The education program requires ongoing collaboration between GYS, DET, TAFE, and the City of Sydney. The GYS provides the premises, youth worker support, catering and other resources. This sustained collaboration is a response to a recognised need. Even so, each service involved is operating at the edge of its core business because funds for educating young people are primarily directed towards schools, and alternative programs must compete for contestable funds or rely on other sources of support.

This paper has been prepared pro-bono by academic staff within the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney. Its preparation contributes to the Faculty's commitment to the local community reflected in the establishment in 2004 of the Glebe Community Development Project (GCDP) in partnership with the NSW Department of Housing (Central Sydney Division). The GCDP aims to strengthen the Glebe community by working with residents, local business, government departments and community organisations to address issues of local concern.

Purpose

The purpose of this briefing paper is to provide key stakeholders with an overview of the history, outcomes and current challenges faced by the GYCEP. Information has been drawn from GYS documents produced since the commencement of the education program, including Steering Committee minutes, annual reports, and prior research. More broadly, the briefing paper draws upon research in the field of youth studies (particularly that related to alternative education) local government reports, and relevant public records (e.g., Australian Bureau of Statistics).

Our overarching aim is to assist GYS to move the program onto a more stable footing.

Current context

GYCEP developed from small beginnings in 2004 to significantly increased enrolments and students' successes by 2006. From 2007 its funding basis has been increasingly fragmented, with changes in funding sources impacting on the nature of the program offered.

At the time of preparation of this briefing paper, the City of Sydney (2008) released its *Draft Glebe Community Safety Plan* in which the key actions identified include:

- a) the delivery of extended hours youth diversionary programming by the City's Youth Services in Glebe; and
- (b) the development of new employment and educational programs for at-risk young people in Glebe.

All prior sources of funding for GYCEP are uncertain for 2009. TAFE funding has been cut by 50% across all its programs, and the Becher Foundation indicated that it will reduce its support for next and will 'only fill in the gaps'.

History and Outcomes

Background

The long-term practice of GYS has been to encourage young people to stay at school. For many years GYS provided weekly outreach to Glebe High School as a way of supporting young people who regularly attended GYS (as well as making GYS more accessible to other students). The restructure of Glebe High School from 2002 into a senior college (by 2005), with junior campuses at Leichhardt and Balmain presented new challenges, particularly for supporting students in adapting to the change requiring attendance at high schools out of the area. Working with Home-School Liaison Officers, the GYS addresses the practical issues of ensuring that students have uniforms, know which bus to catch (going with those who are unsure on their first days at a new school), advocating for them at school when there are issues of attendance, suspension or transfer. It also provides homework help after school and over the years has provided specific programs such as *Links To Learning* (2001-5) for students at risk of dropping out of school and *Sailing Into High School* (2002-3), a Year 7 Transition Support program, both funded by NSW DET. With all educational and other programs provided at GYS, young people also have access to a range of other services and support including accommodation, financial and justice issues, referrals to legal, health and mental health services; as well as assistance with food and transport.

In 1999, Dorothy Bottrell started work as the coordinator of the Glebe Youth Service. Upon learning that she had been a high school teacher, several young people repeatedly asked, 'why can't we have school at the youthie?' The students who were asking for the alternative Year 10 had tried at least three schools each and two had also had short enrolments at TAFE. Although the school system did not work for these young people, they nonetheless valued education and were very keen to obtain the School Certificate. In 2003, when it was obvious that they were not going to be able to complete studies in the mainstream, Dorothy started negotiating with the Port Jackson District Office of the Department of Education and Training and with their support collaboration was established with the Distance Education High School.

2004

With a "head start" in term 4 2003 which provided a space for young people to re-establish routines for attendance and study, in 2004, 13 young people commenced the

Year 10 School Certificate, enrolled in the Distance Education High School and attending GYS three days per week where volunteer tutors assisted them with their work. The students received packages of learning materials from the Distance Education High School and tutors assisted them in completing required work.

The young people who participated in the program had been out of school and unemployed for a minimum of one year. They all left school early due to a combination of personal and family factors, experiences of alienation at school and their learning needs not being met. The two boys who graduated had not been in school since the beginning of high school.

Many of the participants had low levels of literacy and numeracy. This made it difficult for them to engage with the written Distance Education materials, which also require a quick turn around of assignments. However, they were adamant that school or TAFE were not viable options and the familiarity of the youth centre and staff made it the best option for them.

As the year progressed, some students, predictably, dropped off in attendance. Despite many calls, home visits and support, by mid-year two of the Indigenous left the program and the area and four non-Indigenous students had dropped out of the course. By the end of third term two more Indigenous students had dropped out – one due to the demands of parenting a young baby; the other was carer for a family member and dealing with personal issues through counselling.

At the end of the first year, five students obtained the School Certificate.

At the Distance Education High School Presentation Day, one of the students received two additional awards: Year Advisor's Award (one of five awarded; there were 189 Year 10 students); and the Christine McDermott Award – for a senior student who has overcome adversity and displayed a positive spirit and attitude to learning (nominated by staff and Executive). Three students were proudly accompanied by family members, including grandparents. Afterwards, GYS certificates were also presented and students congratulated at an afternoon tea celebration at GYS, well attended by young people and families. Two students who had completed the first semester of the course were also presented with a certificate as GYS acknowledges that every gain in education is an opportunity to encourage continued learning. Knowing that the young people's pathways can often be complex rather than conventional linear transitions, personal gains that strengthen young people's resources for continuing towards the attainment of educational credentials is also recognised as significant:

Having known these young people for several years and seen the hardships they have dealt with, seeing them graduate was a high point of my career as an educator. Moreover, seeing their personal growth over the year, in self-esteem, confidence and pride, has been a great privilege (Dorothy Bottrell, Year 10 Co-ordinator, 2004)

The program commenced in 2003 unfunded. However, through continuing links with Petersham TAFE Outreach, a teacher was able to be funded for one day per week. When continuing funding was unavailable through Petersham, its provision was transferred to Ultimo TAFE in 2004. GYS was also successful in obtaining a grant of \$2k from the Norman Catts Trust Committee. The grant paid for resources, such as a CD player, CD's and materials for Art and Food Technology, mathematical instrument sets, stationery, excursions, food and transport.

2005-6

For the first half of 2005, Ultimo TAFE funded the Outreach teacher for the program. At the start of the 2005/6 financial year, the program was re-funded by TAFE *Start-Up* providing an additional teacher for the program which was running from 9 to 4 on Tuesdays, and 9 to 3 on Thursdays. Additionally TAFE provided two teachers aides; one Indigenous, one non-Indigenous, for each of the two days. Another teacher was “on-loan” 3 hours per week from Balmain High School.

From July 2005, under *Start-Up*, enrolment in the Distance Education High School was replaced by the OTEN (TAFE’s distance education) and Outreach system and, later included TAFE Basic Adult Education. Building on the experience of 2004 and pursuing the aim of engaging students through providing for their needs and interests, from the beginning of 2006 a third day was added to the program to incorporate student participation in Taster courses in Trades and Computer Applications at Ultimo TAFE.

Over 2005-6, program offerings were expanded to include the following options: Certificate 1 in Foundation and Vocational Education; Certificate 1 in Access to Work and Educational Opportunities; Certificate in General and Vocational Education; Statement of Attainment in Aboriginal Studies; Tertiary Preparation Certificate; and Taster options. Some students still studied for the School Certificate. For many students the flexibility of studying through modules was preferred as the pace better suited their needs; though most still required sitting a test for completion.

Over this period the building of collaboration with local community organisations created strong support for the program. Local businesses, The Glebe Chamber of Commerce, The Glebe Society and Glebe Fire Station Community Centre supported the program through mentoring, sponsorship and training opportunities. In 2006, eight volunteers attended a mentoring course conducted by TAFE. Links for young people’s access to continuing educational pathways were also strengthened through the program’s connection with schools and TAFEs, local and further afield.

In 2005, there were 35 enrolments: 10 were regular attendees, and some were Year 9 students, placing additional demands for literacy and numeracy support on the program. In 2006 there were 35 students (meeting the enrolment cap) with 22 attending regularly. There was large overlap of the student cohort from 2005-6 which also included most of the young people who had not completed in 2004. At the end of 2006, over half the cohort had completed the year of study. Of the completing group, nine obtained a Year 10 credential: 6 the Certificate in General and Vocational Education and 3 the School Certificate. Additionally one completed the Year 11 Preliminary year. Of the whole 2006 cohort, 18 young people continued in education in 2007, including 8 who had withdrawn during 2006 (see attached document, *Year 10, GYS, School Report 2006, & 2007 follow up*). The participation, completion and achievement patterns of the 2005-6 students demonstrate the importance of second or more chances for studying for a credential.

In the second half of 2006, Dorothy Bottrell conducted focus groups with students for GYS. While some issues discussed by the young people were specifically about the GYS program or school experience, most explanations for preferring the GYS program were presented in comparison to past school experiences. In broad terms, the dominant theme of discussions in the first two focus groups was that the GYS program is “easier” than school - primarily in terms of its different teaching and learning structures within which the role of teachers features strongly. Authority, rules and support were key issues articulated by the young people, as well as practical issues of

accessibility. There was little discussion of curriculum content; the processes of teaching and learning appeared to be much more important.

Participation at GYS was highly valued as a means of obtaining credentials. This theme was articulated in terms of future opportunities, career-wise and in terms of personal achievement and identity. Completing studies and obtaining credentials were seen as potentially changing others' attitudes towards them. In both groups there were indications that young people experience a stigma associated with "coming from Glebe".

Although most of the young people had not had positive experiences of school, and some were very critical of teachers, they were not simply "anti-school". Their discussions elucidated significant barriers to participation in school and clearly identified how the alternatives offered in the GYS program better met their needs. As one young person said, the mainstream system works well for some students but not for others.

Contrasts (between GYS and school) in the structure of the program, teacher accessibility (approachable, ready to answer questions and provide explanations sufficient for mastery), pedagogical approaches, especially 1:1 tutoring and support, and the sense of safety (being known and with familiar people) and greater freedom (eg. to work at their own pace; not having to ask permission to go to the toilet; being able to take time out when finding it difficult to concentrate or feeling stressed) all contributed to what the young people were articulating as a sense of control over their own learning. This suggests that their experiences at school were disempowering and that this contributed significantly to their failure and early leaving; and points to ways schooling might be more engaging and empowering and thus be more successful in the retention of such young people. Moreover, having a sense of control was central to their participation at GYS and confidence that they would successfully complete Year 10 and proceed to further education or employment. Having ready access to GYS support services was also very important to students in terms of control and confidence. The UTS *Making Connections* (Widin et al, 2008) research which included GYS as a case study, reported similar findings.

2007-8

In 2007, the level of additional support staff (two teachers aides and the Balmain HS teacher) was not made available and the program was under threat almost from the outset with the, the *Start-Up* funding from TAFE set to end in June 2007. A reduced level of 'emergency' private funding for the second half of the year was provided by the Becher Foundation. Of 20 enrolments in 2007, three students gained their School Certificate.

In 2008, under different DET funding arrangements, the Edgware School for Special Purposes became a partner and supplied a teacher and an aide. The GYS education program was replaced by *Re-Engage*. It shifted its focus to under 15 year-olds and commenced at the start of Term 2 with a revised set of DET operating procedures. It was envisaged that after two or three terms at GYS the teenagers would re-engage with mainstream schooling. Young people wanting to undertake a Yr 10 program were not permitted to enrol in this program, and enrolment was capped at fourteen. Attendance thus started at a lower level and dropped off steadily during Terms 2 and 3 but all young people improved their level of attendance compared to before their enrolment. An attendance incentive system was introduced in Term 4 whereby

students received \$200 for 80% and above; the amount reduced incrementally according to attendance.

At the end of 2008, two students indicated that they would re-enrol in mainstream schools.

Backgrounds of the young people who access GYS education programs

This section is largely drawn from published research, conducted in Glebe by Dorothy Bottrell (2007):

In documentation, students attending the GYS education program are commonly referred to as 'school refusers'. While this description is largely accurate, it focuses attention on young people, and allows the contribution of society and its institutions to the marginalisation of some young people to slip from view.

Youth resistances may be reframed as resilience, as positive adaptation despite adversity (Redl 1969; Werner 1989; Werner & Smith 1992). In dealing with marginalisation, difficult circumstances and competing demands, young people's resistances are attempts to counter negative images and to create new 'centres' for themselves. At school and in the community, their resistances in protecting reputation and chosen identity, in refusing to identify with images which denigrate oneself or one's people, and in opposing the requirements of a mainstream participation which does not engage with or value marginal life experience, can all be understood as acts of resilience. These young people do not simply accept or comply with subordinate status assigned them on the margins (Lyman 1981).

The difficulties of low-income families in making ends meet, the stresses and conflicts within families and manifestations of their not coping, especially parental substance abuse and family violence, are contexts of adversity faced by marginal youth. In the Glebe estate there is a high proportion of families with complex needs (Families First 2000), many dealing with mental illness, unemployment, relatives or friends in court and in jail. The early loss of relatives and friends is especially common for Indigenous youth. Young people's stories reveal persistent hardships including problematic drug use and periods of depression and homelessness. Dealing with such adversities, young people are stoic in their acceptance of them as facts of life in their community; nonetheless, these facts are critiqued and problematised. Amongst the older girls interviewed, family loyalties are very strong, but they do not uncritically endorse all that has happened to them. In the development of their own pragmatic philosophies and management strategies, they maintain aspects of family tradition and reject others. This is most evident in their convictions about parenting. Patsy's comments, representative of the young parents, reveal both an indication of the adversity she has faced and her resilience:

I'd like when my kids are teenagers, for them to be able to come to me and say I need money for this or whatever and be able to give it to them. That would make me feel real, knowing I've done my job, to be able to chuck em a sixteenth birthday party or eighteenth or whatever. That's why, you know, I wanna work. Also once my kids are grown up, you know, be able to have that money to go on holidays or be able to give presents for my kids and yeah. But I think of the future a lot, about grandkids and stuff like that, cause I want to be there for them and their kids. I think of it all the time, you know, I want to do things differently, everything, buying toys or food or, you know, just the whole thing. What in life I have, they got the opposite, you know, a better world.

The social problems of marginalised communities constitute adversity; but the evidence of this research suggests that processes and experiences of social marginalisation are even more difficult to live with. One mental health professional described the adversities arising out of the social divisions of Glebe and faced by Glebe youth in the everyday as equivalent to living in conditions of post-traumatic stress. Given the difficulties they face in private and public aspects of their lives, it is surprising that Glebe youth are not angrier; that they have not been in more trouble; and that they are willing to persist in negotiating what are often bureaucratic, complex or difficult systems (education, housing, social and community services) rather than take what is in some ways the easier, certainly more accessible, route of meeting material needs through the local criminal economy. That they do persist with schooling, albeit intermittently, and in the longer-term realise accomplishments across varied career domains such as employment, housing, relationships and parenting are indications of their strengths.

Problems arise not only from the fact that resistances have conventionally been taken out of context, but also from the ways in which resilience is conceptualised. Traditionally defined in contrast to delinquency and unhealthy development, resilience is framed as individualised (normative) conformity located only within mainstream participation. Decontextualised and asocial definitions of resilience may be too narrow to identify marginal forms. Recognising resilience in marginal youth requires appreciation of relative context, cultural options and understanding from alternative centres. Such shifts may recognise different forms of cultural labour (Cohen & Ainley 2000), help to identify youth potential rather than transgression, and point to the kinds of interventions which may strengthen rather than correct participation in a range of learning communities and contexts.

Locating the GYS within the range of alternative education programs for marginalised youth

Historically, NSW DET has funded a range of alternatives in education for young people for whom mainstream schooling is not working. That the HSC or equivalent is now regarded as the minimum credential required by young people for successful mainstream pathways, and in the current economic climate, provision for marginalised young people is more pressing than ever.

Te Riele (2007) proposes two dimensions that are especially useful for mapping the variety of alternative education (government and non-government provided) programs: the locus of change and the stability of the program. The first dimension identifies whether a program seeks to change the young person or change the provision of education. Changing the young person usually involves compensating for a perceived lack of knowledge, skills, or 'proper' behaviour thereby facilitating re-engagement in a mainstream setting. Whereas, changing the curriculum and/or providing a different pedagogical is intended to better meet the needs of young people, and thus enable them to learn and gain educational qualifications.

'The second dimension is based on the stability of the alternative program. One end of the dimension refers to programs with low stability, usually due to uncertain funding. These educational programs tend to be connected to a charity or community organisation and often (but not always) offer short-term projects with an *ad hoc* nature on a part time basis. At the other end of the dimension are highly stable educational alternatives. These are usually established schools or units/annexes within schools that

offer either full-time withdrawal programs for some weeks or months, or a long-term comprehensive program as an alternative to mainstream schools, leading to school credentials' (p. 58).

Combining the two dimensions leads to a map with four sections. Te Riele acknowledges that some programs will sit near the borders between quarters, rather than neatly inside one.

Having appraised the advantages and disadvantages of programs in each of the quarters, Te Riele concludes that stable programs of the 4th quarter type provide the greatest "opportunity and hope for marginalised young people" (p. 64).

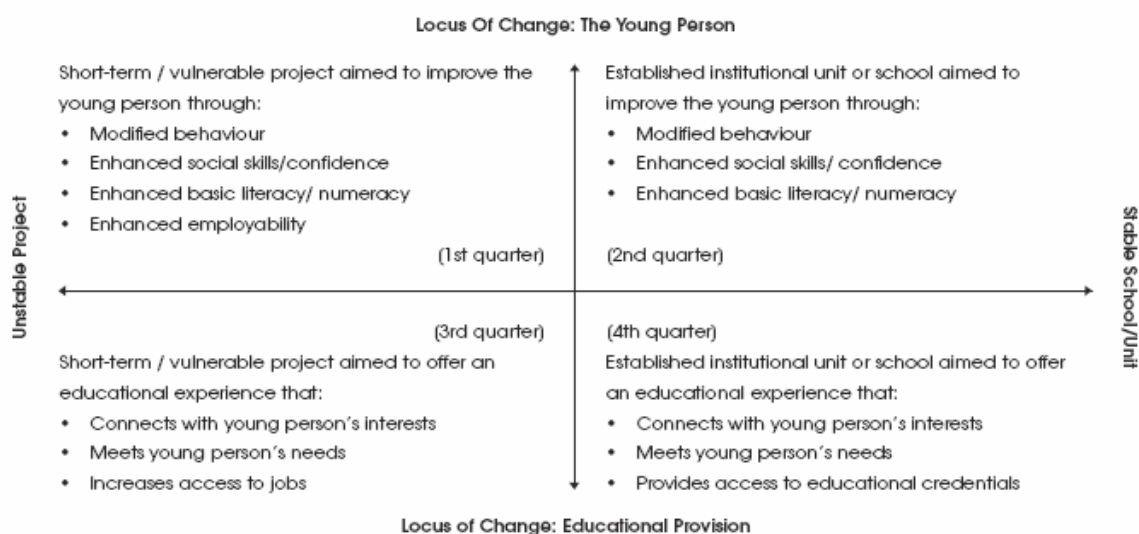


Figure 1: Map of educational alternatives for marginalised youth

The unstable nature of the GYS program is an enduring feature. The education program at GYS has changed over time. From 2004-7, the program offered pathways to Years 10, 11 and 12 in the school system; to mainstream CGVE and TPC programs in TAFE at Ultimo, Randwick and other colleges; and to a wide range of TAFE vocational courses. In 2008, the primary focus of the program was to re-engage young people in the Year 8-9 age group in a mainstream education of training program. In terms of the above map, this represents a shift from the 3rd quarter to the 1st quarter. Shifts in the funding arrangement for 2008 had a significant impact. In effect, there was a shift in the nature of the program to meet funding requirements that resulted in program offerings more suited to students who thrive with behaviourally focused structures, at odds with what the young people have expressed as supportive to their engagement.

It is important to note that student feedback in the 2006 focus groups emphasised the significance of relationships, structures and their interactive effects – in both their critiques and valuing of mainstream schooling and the accounts of how the GYS program engaged them and enhanced their learning. Key aspects of what young people value and what works for them (enables access to education) coincides with Te Riele's 4th quarter.

Shifting the GYS program into the 4th quarter would mean attaining conditions of stability and continuity (especially through funding). These are primary requirements for achieving outcomes that reflect the interests of educators, the Glebe community, society and the young people themselves.

Furthermore, reinstating the focus of the program as it was in 2004-7 and building on past achievements may be considered as disrupting patterns of control and resistance and firmly establishing a positive cycle of systemic adaptation that elicits students' engagement and educational achievement. This approach draws on young people's resilience and through more appropriate program structures sets out the conditions for minimising detrimental aspects of resistance, amplifying resilience in positive directions.

What is costs

The primary cost associated with the continuation of the program is the provision of experienced teaching staff. Assuming twenty equivalent full time students, the estimated minimum adequate provision would be one full time equivalent teacher, supported by a teachers aide as well as Home School Liaison officer, youth workers, mentors, etc. Other costs include stationery, art materials, food (for cooking activities within Food Technology), excursions and catering.

The following budget for 2009 proposed by GYS assumes a program of 3 days per week (18 hours) with 20 hours per week X 40 weeks allocated for staff (at TAFE casual rates).

Costs	Amount (\$)
Special Program Co-ordinator/Teacher	70 400
Teachers Aide	48 000
Food – breakfast program and lunches	5 000
Class materials including Art; Food Technology; Stationery (incl. Folders)	3 600
Incentive scheme, running for 3 terms	3 000
Excursions	1 000
One mid-year camp for 3 nights, including staffing	3 500
Training and professional development	1 000
Graduation and promotion, incl. printing costs	500
TOTAL	\$136 000

Prepared by Colin Stokes and Roelof Smilde, GYS.

Recommendations

Based on the above considerations, we make the following recommendations:

1. The GYS program should return to the successful structure and format that obtained successful outcomes in 2004-7, based on the needs and interests of the young people and maintaining a variety of transitioning pathways;
2. Stability for the program is established with a minimum 3-year funding cycle;
3. Continuity in staffing is a priority for the program;

4. Collaboration is ongoing between GYS, CYCEP partners and the University of Sydney Faculty of Education and Social Work for the future development of the program.

Associate Professor Deb Hayes
Dr Dorothy Bottrell
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Attachment: *Year 10, GYS, School Report 2006, & 2007 follow up* provided by GYS.