

Beacon Foundation

helping young people gain real jobs, dignity and self-respect

About 40 per cent of all unemployed people in Australia are aged under 25 years. That's 212,000 young people out of work. This figure could expand given that almost 26,000 students are still leaving school early each year, and remain out of the workforce 12 months later. The situation is worse for indigenous Australians.

The Beacon Foundation addresses the issue of youth employment by working with young people before they leave school to help them develop the skills and confidence needed to achieve personal success for themselves and their community.

Beacon projects demonstrate solutions to unemployment and encourage self help.

Beacon's first program, No Dole, started in Tasmania in 1995 in response to the overwhelming numbers of young people going out the school gate without any real purpose or idea about their future pathway. The program was so successful it has now been replicated at more than 90 schools around Australia.

Beacon continues to develop and expand its complementary program range, which includes:

- *No Dole*: encourage students to reject the dole as an ambition by committing to further education, employment or training. It focuses on informing young people about all their options post compulsory schooling and providing individual career planning. Local industries and educators actively support participants, instilling in them the skills and confidence they need in the workforce.
- *Polish*: is an initiative that builds on the No Dole program, providing presentation and communication training in a one-day dynamic workshop. The program builds students' personal confidence, interview techniques and deportment skills.

- *Real Jobs*: addresses the need for on-going alternatives to welfare by providing real, sustainable, viable jobs in local regions and within participating communities. It creates viable small businesses capable of offering young people permanent employment.
- *Midland Indigenous Youth Project (MIYP)*: is an intensive school-to-work transition program for indigenous students. The students are given one-on-one support, career guidance and planning from Grade 10 to post-employment.

WHY SVA BACKS BEACON

SVA supports Beacon because it has a well defined, measurable 'whole of community' intervention program which addresses employment pathways and school transition for young people. It has professional infrastructure, a strong capacity-building focus and it has a proven and ever-improving track record of success.

GROWTH

Beacon has experienced rapid growth since its first program in 1995, but particularly over the past three years. In 2005 there were 62 schools using its flagship No Dole program, growing to 74 schools a year later, then to 90 schools in 2007. More than 10,800 students benefited in 2007 alone.

Since SVA started working with Beacon in 2002, it has provided the organisation with portfolio management, consulting services, mentoring, an independent financial management audit, strategy advice to the Board, financial management training, new program development, funding and networks into the business community. Significantly, it has attracted permanent funding for Beacon projects from AMP and Macquarie Group.

PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS

Every March, six months after No Dole students have completed Year 10, Beacon surveys students who took part in the program in order to evaluate its success. In the first year of No Dole at Brooks High School in Launceston, the number of students going on to the dole halved. Within three years that figure was down to 1 per cent, a result that's been maintained for the past decade.

In 2007, 8,088 students from 2006 were tracked, with 97.5 per cent of them ending up in further education, employment or training. (The closest comparable indicator is from the Dusseldorf Foundation research, indicating a national average of 86 per cent.)

All schools running the No Dole program today report significant positive benefits for the school, community and, most importantly, the students. Through this program parents, teachers and the students themselves report that they have greater understanding and confidence about their career decisions following year 10.

Beacon runs the Real Jobs program 'Something Concrete' in the WA outback town of Kununurra. Through the project a new business enterprise building pre-cast concrete houses has been established, tackling dual issues of Indigenous youth unemployment and a lack of housing. Fourteen indigenous trainees have completed four houses, the WA government has ordered another five and the business is expanding to establish a pre-casting factory.

An independent evaluation report for the MIYP in June found the program dramatically boosted school-to-work transition rates and reduced anti-social behaviour. About 90 per cent of participants in MIYP went on to employment at the end of compulsory schooling, compared to 67 per cent of those in the general population. This translates to nine Indigenous young people who are no longer at high risk of continuing disadvantage.

WHAT'S AHEAD

Beacon's focus now is on refining and improving the delivery of the No Dole program. To that end, it has imposed a cap of 130 schools for 2008 to ensure the highest quality outcomes. Eventually, it would like to see students run the No Dole program in their schools rather than teachers to give the students management experience and ownership of the success of the program.

Beacon's future growth is being focused on trialing and rolling out regionally-specific programs. One of these involves a mentoring partnership between principals and business leaders. Beacon is also working with local industry to encourage stronger engagement from business to help address local employment opportunities.