



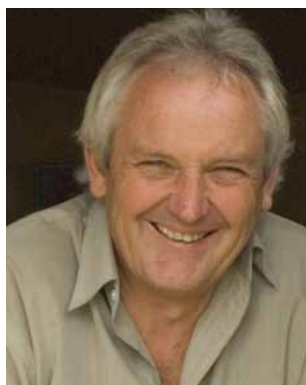
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Frankston, VIC

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[www.handonlearning.info](http://www.handonlearning.info)

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*'Our experience of the partnership with SVA has been a very positive one, enabling us to develop the program from running in one school with a capacity to support 40 students, into a program which is now established in multiple schools in a number of States, with over 500 students. SVA were instrumental in enabling us to develop a business plan and various skill sets to facilitate this growth. The provision of a mentor scheme was particularly valuable as well as the close engagement of portfolio managers who had time to invest in the detailed step-by-step development of the program.'*

**Russell Kerr**

Chief Executive Officer  
Hands on Learning

**How we came together**

One of the ongoing challenges facing Australian education is the number of young people who become disconnected and disengaged from traditional school work, which is often abstract and theoretical in nature. This can lead to deeply entrenched negative attitudes and behaviours, which impact student potential well into the future.

Hands on Learning (HoL) was established by Russell Kerr in 1999 as a response to a clearly identified need amongst troubled students. He initiated a program designed to effectively break this pattern of disengagement. With over 30 years of teaching experience, Russell Kerr believes in the need to bring community back into schools to make education more relevant for young people.

By 2004, after five years of operation Hands on Learning (HoL) was still functioning as a start-up as it continued to run an in-school program in the one school in Frankston where it started. But new possibilities arose when HoL, having shown tremendous promise to be scaled or replicated, attracted the support of SVA. This support assisted in the establishment of a pilot scheme in three other schools.

**Mission**

To provide an alternative learning framework for disengaged students to reconnect with school and community.

**Purpose**

Hands on Learning (HoL) works with young people in Years 7 to 10 who are struggling with mainstream education. HoL offers a supportive *in-school* learning program where young people work in small teams on practical and creative projects in the school and local community, usually for one day a week. HoL provides opportunities for young people to develop positive ongoing relationships with adults, offering them a chance to engage and participate. The committed HoL team includes teachers and artisans who act as role models, mentors and provide incidental counseling. Emphasising the everyday value of literacy and numeracy skills, the program is centred upon the concept of 'learning by doing' and achieves positive impact on participant engagement in school life. HoL has targeted schools in lower socio-economic regions.

**Growth**

- Funding and support from SVA has seen the HoL program replicated from a single presence in 1999 at Frankston High School Melbourne, to 23 programs predominantly in Melbourne, but also for Indigenous students on the Cape York Peninsula QLD.
- HoL has grown substantially in terms of the number of young people who can access the program and the number of trained staff. Since HoL was established, over 1000 students have participated in the HoL program – some for two years. The project has formed strong links to other schools, community groups and businesses and established relationships with academics.

## Social impact

- HoL participants attend school at greater rates than the general school population – which is particularly significant given the at-risk nature of the majority of HoL students. Absenteeism for HoL students attending the program is 1.5 per cent of the participant group, compared to 10.2 per cent for HoL students attending their regular school classes, while the Victorian state average for absence days per student in Years 7 to 10 is 17 per cent.
- At HoL's Cape York Peninsula QLD program, overall absenteeism at the school has reduced to 31.9 per cent compared to 89.5 per cent before HoL started its program. This demonstrates HoL's capacity to re-engage students.
- Schools running HoL have significantly higher retention rates than the Victorian state average with 95.5 per cent of HoL students enrolled at the same school from Year 7 through to Year 10, compared to 82 per cent for HoL schools and 73 per cent for Victorian schools (data from 1999 to 2006).
- Students have shown consistently improved levels of commitment towards completing their secondary schooling, with some remarkable academic success stories emerging from the program. 89 per cent of HoL participants report a positive impact on their interest in school and engagement with learning. Employer levels of satisfaction with HoL graduates have been high.

Initial SVA distribution	<b>2004</b>		
Total distributions from SVA	\$602,450		
SVA in-kind support	\$210,000		
– SVA Consulting – strategic plan (2008)	\$30,000		
– cash and in-kind, SVA <i>Future Builders Program</i> evaluation framework and resource funding (2007-08)	\$135,000		
SVA brokered support			
– leveraged funding (State Governments and schools)	\$818,000		
– Matrix on Board financial systems assessment (2008)	\$10,000		

	2003	2009	CAGR
Revenue*	\$130,000	\$400,000	20.6%
Participants**	63	426	37.5%

\* Revenue and participant numbers available for calendar year only

\*\* Estimate for calendar year 2009

## Why HoL is graduating

HoL has successfully begun to scale its model in Victoria and has replicated it in Queensland. In mid 2008, SVA reviewed its engagement model with non-profit organisations, and with the commencement of the new SVA model of Venture Development, HoL unfortunately did not meet the revised criteria for participation in the new portfolio. Over the past year, SVA has worked closely with HoL to ensure its sustainability.

## Looking ahead

The HoL program has established itself as an important partner in the Australian education system. There are plans to introduce the HoL program into many more schools across Australia during 2010 as Federal funding is gradually distributed through the Federal State National Partnerships. This will initially include growth into more regional areas in Victoria, commencement of the program in NSW and further expansion in North Queensland.