

# Lead On

inspiring and enabling young people to be active and contribute to their communities

Communities that fail to tap into their young people could be losing one of the richest resources available to them. Recognising this in the late 1990s, community leaders in regional Victoria looked at the dual challenges of connecting with and engaging their young people while helping build a more sustainable future for the region.

The result was the creation of Lead On Australia, a community enterprise structure which today enables young people across the country to engage and become involved in real-life business and community activities. Lead On's aim is simple – to develop and broaden the range of skills and experiences our young people have in their communities. And it seeks to change local perception, encouraging others to give local young people a go. On the other side, Lead On sources the expertise and experience of community leaders and businesses in an effort to enhance everyone's experience in relation to the contribution our young people can make in the community. Ultimately, it works to create communities that are sustainable, cohesive, inclusive and can realise their full potential.

Lead On is a non-profit organisation that builds community capacity by engaging young people in a range of projects and activities in, and with, their community. Supported by a coordinator, the young participants manage and deliver projects themselves. These projects give young people an opportunity to engage, debate with and influence business and community leaders and, ultimately, to be part of the future of their communities.

Lead On provides a framework for young people to connect with their communities, be exposed to the opportunities within their communities and obtain valuable experience to help them move into employment and further training and learning. Lead

On also helps organisations gain access to young people through the project activity and its Youth Advisory Council structure.

The main Lead On programs include:

- *Community Door*: places young people on local boards and committees to help them build skills, community awareness and new connections and contribute to the decision making.
- *The Loop newspaper*: gives young people the opportunity to design, write and edit a newspaper supplement.
- *Friends of Lead On*: provides opportunities for older people from the business community to take active roles in mentoring and assisting young people by sharing their business experiences.

## WHY SVA BACKS LEAD ON

SVA supports Lead On because it has developed a successful model for building local capacity by connecting young people to the community. It builds a structure around community need rather than simply delivering programs. SVA has engaged consultants for an evaluation of the program in 2008.

## GROWTH

Since its establishment in Bendigo in 1999, Lead On now offers programs in 14 communities across five states. In its eight years of operation, more than 6200 young people from diverse backgrounds have participated in Lead On projects or activities. And more than 800 businesses and organisations have provided projects so the young people connect with their communities and are awakened to the possibilities within their community.

## PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS

As its regional spread continues, Lead On's impact grows. The thousands of people who have taken active part in its programs over time have collectively received 116,000 hours of community investment and personal development skills. As a direct result of their Lead On involvement, more than 400 young people have gained employment.

Further, about 120 young people have chosen to become more involved by becoming committee members of a business or community organisation – evidence of succession planning in motion. And hundreds of young people have found new mentors and role models from their communities and have been exposed to the possibilities within their communities. Each business partner has been exposed to the views of young people – the future clients and employees of their business and the future leaders in their communities.

Significantly, growing numbers of the 14 Lead On centres are achieving sustainability as they are being funded and driven by the local community with the active involvement of participants.

## WHAT'S AHEAD

The main growth target for Lead On in the short term will be to implement the findings of strategic planning being undertaken in early 2008 within its existing sites. Lead On is also in discussions with three new communities about opening potential sites. Each application is being assessed based on its potential for sustainability and strategic fit with Lead On and its major corporate supporter, Bendigo Bank. Lead On Australia's longer term plan is aimed at building higher levels of self-sustainability through strategic corporate partners.