

YOUNG MUMS IN EDUCATION *PILOT PROJECT*

Summary

In October 2003 six young mums from the Nambucca Valley enrolled in the TAFE Outreach Young Mums in Education *pilot project*. Students would gain TAFE business qualifications while coordinating a community festival.

The festival *Frolic in the Valley* was held on 4th April 2004 as an official Youth Week activity in the Nambucca Valley. The festival was an overall success both for the host community and as an outcome of the course.

Rather than a formal learning environment, participants attended 2 ½ days every week over six months to plan the festival in a vocational environment.

The organisational structure of the group mirrored that of a small production company. Participants took on job titles which derived from past work experience, studies and future career goals. As a production company, the group soon became known as YCW Productions (Young Creative Women).

Work tasks encompassed sponsorship, funding, marketing, festival operations, purchasing, festival program, occupational health and safety, risk management, accounts and contracts.

TAFE modules matched either the actual task, or more likely the process involved in accomplishing a task such as '9763G Operate a computer' or '9702N Produce simple word processed documents'.

In all participants achieved up to fourteen TAFE modules through the duration of the course and more importantly were inspired to study further and broaden their horizons in terms of career goals.

Outcomes

The course

The course brought together six TAFE participants (young mums), four Work for the Dole participants and two volunteers.

Flexible learning times were respected by participants who often referred to the project as ‘work’ rather than study. Surveys indicated the acquisition of educational qualifications were an ‘*added bonus*’. However, participants generally felt inspired to undertake further education.

Participants acquired job titles which included *marketing coordinator, accounts coordinator, program coordinator, production coordinator, festival designer and operations assistant*.

Participants realised they were undertaking work experience as well as learning. One participant commented “I have learned more in the past five months than in the past four years of working”.

Project management strategies including Work in Progress meetings, the development of a critical path and individual recognition of jobs aided the participants to realise the work they had achieved while gaining ‘hands on’ experience in the business environment.

Learning in this environment has enhanced the desire for further education as well as ‘broadening horizons’ in terms of employment options and goals.

Social benefits

Amongst the TAFE students, the project had a low ‘drop out’ rate where most participants completed the entire course. Of the young mums, all but one completed the first five months of the course. An additional participant left during the last month.



All but one of the participants are still involved with one another on a social level. These participants support one another and meet on a weekly basis to attend the Young Mums playgroup in Macksville and other social occasions.

Many participants have also had extended contact with external entities including business, media, schools and welfare agencies. At least one participant has created a job opportunity through the process of coordinating sponsorship for the festival.

For the Work for the Dole participants and volunteers who were introduced to the course an awareness of the problems faced by mothers, particularly young mothers was gained. Spending time with the participants played a role in breaking down stereotypical ideas about young mums.

Advocacy services

Various government and welfare entities were introduced to the group each week. These include Family Daycare, Womens Health, Community Housing, Wesley Uniting Employment, Centrelink, the Division of General Practice and Anne Gillian a private solicitor.

Advocacy services made real differences in the lives of the participants. This was an important component of the course.

During the past three months a welfare student also worked with the group both on daily activities, and in conducting workshops in a variety of health and welfare issues including stress, anxiety, motivation and team work.

Though some participants were apprehensive about childcare facilities in the beginning, throughout the course they made greater use of public childcare facilities. These contacts will last after the course.

The Festival

The festival had a major impact on the self esteem of participants. There were also other benefits for the greater community.

Funding for festival day derived from Indent (Music NSW) \$2,200 and the Nambucca Heads RSL, \$1,800. A contribution was also made by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) as a Work for the Dole activity.

An Economic Impact Statement (EIS) indicated each festival participant (2,000 people) spent approx. \$12 throughout the day, equating to a total spend of \$24,000. An additional \$4,000 was spent to produce the festival, and \$2,000 throughout the six month planning phase. Additional flow-on effects included the event producers wage, several other wages for festival day, stall holder supplies and tourism spend equating to an approximate value of \$55,000. In total, the event contributed around \$95,000 to the local economy.

Festival day aided jobs for several artists and a driver for the day through BusWays (bus company). Income was also gained for several other local business including In-Phase productions, Evans Print, Deus Creative, Mid- Coast Security and Harris Hire.

Several local charities also benefited from the festival. These include the Valley Rescue Association, Valley Skaters and Valley Rescue Association Marine.

Stallholders at the festival also reported profitable days. All stallholders were chosen from local and neighbouring communities.

Entertainment throughout the day included children's activities, live music, sidewalk chalk drawing, soapbox topics, workshops in graffiti art, yoga, circus skills (Slippery Sirkus) and tai kwondo.

Performers on the day were primarily young people from the local community. The festival allowed these artists a rare opportunity to perform to a large amount of people.

While promoting the festival, with the aid of Youth Worker Sue Harvey, participants were able to enter Macksville and Nambucca High School to create chalk-art works which would be an element of the festival.

This was a new experience for both schools. Macksville High Students were particularly entertained as they were able to assist the artwork process. This also assisted the relationship between local youth workers and the youth of the valley.

Local media were very supportive of the festival. 2NVR/Goori Broadcasters broadcast live from the festival throughout the day. The Guardian and Happynings also provided a generous amount of support both prior to and after the festival. For the youth of the Nambucca Valley, festival day was a safe, entertaining event which brought the Valley together.

The future

Several of the course participants are now planning Frolic in the Valley for 2005.

A shorter course which caters to the needs of young mums will start on 2nd September in Bowraville and Nambucca Heads. This course will create a database of artists throughout the Nambucca Valley. After the duration of 12 weeks, the course will host an event in Bowraville to present the valuable resource back to the community.

Nambucca Heads High School is also undertaking research into the possibility of young mums attending the school both as part of the existing curriculum, and external students.