

‘Work it out’

**A Brotherhood of St Laurence
and
Brunswick Secondary College
partnership project**

Implementation to July 1997

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**Brotherhood of St Laurence
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Introduction

The Transition Project is a two year partnership project between Brunswick Secondary College (BSC) and the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL). It seeks to improve the transition of young people who choose to leave school early into post-school training and employment. This first stage of the project commenced in February 1997 and will be extended to a second school in the Westernport region in late 1997.

This is the first internal report to the Transition Project Coordinating and School-based Committees regarding implementation of the project with BSC to July 1997. It outlines major features of the project and identifies issues for consideration in future project development at BSC and developments in the Westernport region.

The report has been prepared from existing project documentation, consultation with BSC and BSL staff involved in the project and discussion with two groups of students. Part one of the report provides an overview of the project including its aim, objectives, main activities undertaken to July 1997 and the project setting. The findings from the discussions with the BSC students are presented in part two. Major issues for consideration by the Committees raised during the staff consultations are presented in part three of the report which also describes features of service delivery and lessons from the project to date.

Part one: Overview of the project

The Transition Project is a Trust funded project which provides an opportunity for the BSL to employ two Project Officers to be located in two school sites. At each school, BSC and another in the Westernport region, the Project Officers will work closely with a small number of students (about 20) in order to assist them to undertake structured training or other activities which will lead to employment after they leave. The overall target group for the project is anyone who leaves school before completing Year 12 with priority on those young people leaving during Year 10 or Year 11.

It is expected that the project will operate until the end of 1998, for about two years with BSC and for about 12 months with the second school (to be selected late 1997). While the overall aim and objectives for the project at both sites will be the same, actual implementation will probably vary between the two sites because of likely differences in school and local area characteristics. The operation of the project will be decided through negotiation with school representatives.

Project structure

Two Project Officers and a part-time Research Officer will be employed by the BSL to work on the Transition Project. One Project Officer is currently located two days per week at the BSL's Employment Action Centre, and three days per week at BSC. The Research Officer is employed in the Social Action and Research unit of the BSL. An additional Project Officer will be employed by the BSL and located at the Westernport region school.

Project management for the BSC project is provided by the Deputy Centre Manager, Employment Action Centre. A School-based Committee comprising representatives from BSC (Student Services Coordinator, VCE/VET Coordinator and Futures Project Officer) and BSL (Deputy Centre Manager, Project Officer and Research Officer) will implement the project at a local level. In addition, a BSL-based Coordinating Committee will monitor the development and implementation of the project across the two school sites.

Evaluation

An evaluation is central to implementation of the Transition Project and will inform its development. There are two aims of the project evaluation reflecting its program development purpose, and its policy and social action purposes. These aims are:

- To inform the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the participating school on the usefulness of the pilot project in facilitating school to post-school employment, education and training activities for young people who leave school early.
- To contribute to the development of policy and programs for young people who leave school early by making the results of the project available to a broader audience.

It is envisaged that the research component of the project will operate within the committee structures outlined above.

Project aim

The aim of the Transition Project is to design and implement a service model which enhances the transition by young people who leave school before completing Year 12 to further education and training or other activity which is linked to achieving employment (*source: Brief project model 30/07/97, p.2*).

Project objectives

The objectives of the project at the service delivery level include:

1. To assist students to make informed choices regarding a vocational or career plan by providing up-to-date and relevant advice on potential career paths, including opportunities at school to develop relevant knowledge and skills about the local labour market, and employment and training opportunities.
2. To assist students when they make the decision to leave school by providing up-to-date and relevant information regarding the support services available to assist them to seek employment and training or personal support and making an agreed referral to a relevant organisation which can facilitate post-school support for the young person.
3. To enhance young people's access to services by developing protocols with local welfare and employment and training agencies which underpin the referral process.
4. To assist a small number of young people by providing personal support and maintaining contact with them during the transitional period from leaving school to entering employment and/or training or re-entering school education, and facilitate this process by providing ongoing, up-to-date and relevant information regarding opportunities provided through the New Apprenticeship system and making additional referrals to relevant employment and training agencies, including the BSL's own services.
5. To assist the evaluation of the project through the identification of good practice in providing advice on potential vocational pathways, supporting students at the point they decide to leave school, and linking early school leavers with employment, education and training (*source: Brief project model 30/7/97, p.2*).

Overview of project implementation

The following tasks and activities had been undertaken by July 1997 in order to initiate the Transition Project in two school sites.

Planning phase

- March 1996 - Trust funding received by the BSL to implement a two year project which assists young people who leave school early.
- July to December 1996 - Program development undertaken including literature review and consultation with internal and external informants in order to identify a broad framework for the project, including draft aim and objectives.
- December 1996 - “Call for expressions of interest in pilot partnership” distributed to inner urban secondary colleges to elicit interest in working with the BSL on the Transition Project. This document is provided as Appendix A.

Early implementation

- February 1997 - Transition Project Officer employed to work with the inner city school. Subsequent developmental work undertaken by the Project Officer included reading literature about overseas and Australian programs which focus on transition issues; outlining the service delivery model; contacting other service providers and relevant agencies such as the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation, Melbourne City Mission, Moreland City Council; assisting with the development of the Agreement (see below); and designing referral and action plan proforma and case note files.
- February 1997 - Research Officer employed 13 hours per week.
- February 1997 - School representatives who expressed interest in the project were interviewed and BSC was selected as partnership school.
- March 1997 - Commencement of negotiation with BSC representatives regarding detail of project implementation.
- April to May 1997 - Agreement reached, document written and signed which outlines nature of partnership relationship between BSC and the BSL. This is provided as Appendix B.
- June 1997 - Screening of referrals to the project commenced and the first student was referred to the project. Two group discussions with BSC students were undertaken as part of the project evaluation.
- July 1997 - Launch of the BSC project and announcement of local project name, ‘*Work it out*’.
- July 1997 - Call for expressions of interest in pilot partnership distributed to Frankston and Hastings secondary colleges.

Project setting

This section of the report describes aspects of the City of Moreland in which BSC is located, and it provides information about the College.

The local area

BSC is located within the City of Moreland which was created via two amalgamations in 1994. It encompasses the former Cities of Coburg and Brunswick and the southern area of the former City of Broadmeadows. The following demographic characteristics of Moreland residents, which have been identified by the City of Moreland (Walker 1996a & 1996b), are presented here to illustrate the education and employment characteristics of the city's young people.

- ◇ Low Year 12 retention rates - 'In 1993, the North Western Melbourne region (Moreland and most of Hume) had one of the two-lowest apparent Year 12 retention rates, at 65% versus a Melbourne average of 84%'. Local retention rates do not appear to have changed between 1993 and 1995, with the combined areas of Broadmeadows, Brunswick and Coburg recording 65% retention rates (Walker 1996a, p.5).
- ◇ Low, and falling, participation by both school leavers and young adults in higher education - While the Melbourne Statistical Division has seen an increase in school leaver participation in higher education from 27% in 1990 and 32% in 1994, North West Melbourne has seen a decline from 22% to 19% over the same period. Students in the North West who proceed to higher education are much more likely to attend TAFE (participation over 21%) compared to tertiary (participation approximately 11%) (Walker 1996a, p.16).
- ◇ Young people and birthplace - 'Young people aged less than 25 currently make up 30% of Moreland's population. Those aged 20-24 constitute the largest group of Moreland's young people. The main countries of birth, for young people born overseas, were Turkey, Lebanon and Vietnam. However, less than 20% of Moreland's young people were actually born overseas. The main languages (other than English) spoken at home, by persons aged 5-24 years old, are Italian, Arabic, Greek and Turkish, reflecting the ethnic backgrounds of many of their parents' (Walker 1996b, p.11).
- ◇ High unemployment rates - 'The unemployment rate for Melbourne's North Western labour force region - which covers Moreland and most of Hume - was 11.1% in June 1996, compared to 9.3% for the entire Melbourne Statistical Division. Two-thirds of Moreland's 15-24 year olds were in the workforce in 1991, with nearly 25% of this group being unemployed. Within the 15-19 age range, teenage unemployment was 32% in 1991 and this rate hit 47% in July 1995' (Walker 1996b, p.23-24) (Note: this data is subject to high error rate).
- ◇ Key industries - Manufacturing and retailing are the two key industries providing employment opportunities in the City of Moreland, however, not all workers would themselves live in the municipality. The largest occupational group are clerks followed by labourers and related workers (Walker 1996b).

Brunswick Secondary College

In 1996, 664 students in Year 7 to Year 12 attended the college, comprising 381 males and 283 females. Over half (375) of all students were located on the senior site in Years 10 to 12. As many as 20 different 'home languages' were represented by the total student population at BSC with the most prevalent languages spoken including Arabic (191), English (151), African (78), Greek (70), Vietnamese (47), Turkish (46), and Italian (23).

In 1996, 51 students at Year 10 and 53 students at Year 11 left the school. Of the total 104 departures, 49 students were looking for work, 19 went to another school, 10 went to employment, 6 entered TAFE, 10 travelled overseas or interstate, and the destination of the remaining 10 is unknown (*source: Expression of Interest from BSC, 16/12/96*).

BSC offers a number of vocational education programs and additional school programs designed to assist 'students at risk'.

The vocational programs include: work education in Year 10 with work experience for mainstream and ESL students; vocational education training programs in retail operations, office administration, automotive and information technology which include work placements; industry links through special placements such as the E(enterprise) Team; and links with TAFE. Additional initiatives include 3 year VCE for students with interrupted schooling, redemption VCE program for students with unsatisfactory Year 10 results, and career counselling at Year 10 to Year 11 transition.

Student support and welfare programs provided by BSC include the following activities.

- Future Options program - group work, career education and life skills for students 'at risk' of leaving;
- ESL transition and welfare program - work experience and personal development for students with refugee background or interrupted schooling;
- 'You can do it' - including motivation and study skills;
- Student welfare and outreach support - providing housing and young women's support, drug and alcohol services, youth services and Vietnamese support; and
- A Jobs, Placement, Employment and Training (JPET) program - which targets BSC students but is auspiced by a local agency.

The Transition Project seeks to integrate personal support and welfare assistance with vocational training for students who decide to leave school before completing Year 12. The project was seen by most staff consulted for this report to complement and extend the current vocational education and student support programs offered at BSC. Their descriptions of the way the Transition Project fitted with existing programs included the following comments:

'Fits into the network of student services...Hopefully it will become integrated into school policies and procedures and not just an off-shoot'.

'Adds on to other programs - some help for those students who want to stay on at school and not go to uni but to do dual recognition courses, other courses help the young people who want to stay, and this project helps those who want to leave'.

Part two: Consultation with students

Two groups of students from Year 10 were consulted by the Research Officer and Transition Project Officer in June 1997 regarding a range of issues in the transition from school to work. A group of six females and a group of eight males were consulted separately. The students were not project participants at the time of talking with them.

The purpose of consulting students was to explore their reasons for wanting to stay at or to leave school, the barriers to completing Year 12 and the types of supports which would help them achieve their goals or to complete Year 12. It was expected that this would provide some preliminary insights into the attitudes and expectations of young people at the school.

The Student Services Coordinator selected the 14 students for participation in the group discussions based on the broad criteria of being 'at risk' of leaving school early and with low-income backgrounds. The groups included eight males and six female and all were in Year 10. Eleven of the students were 15 years of age, and three were 16. All of the 16 year olds received Austudy, and ten students received an allowance from their family. The main languages spoken at home were English (five students), Greek (three students), Arabic (two students), Turkish (two students), Assyrian (one student) and Chinese (one student). Twelve of the fourteen students (including all of the females) wanted to complete Year 12.

Experience of school

The students consulted in the group discussions talked about school as 'good', 'work', 'fun', 'boring', 'employment', 'learning' and 'education'. As expected, they were all well aware of the importance of staying at school for as long as possible to get an education and to learn in order to improve their future employment and career prospects. They said they wanted to stay at school 'to get an education and to go as far as I can', 'to get a good career' and because 'if you want a good job you have to go to school'. However, two students, one female and one male, stated that they came to school 'because of my parents' and because 'my parents want me to finish'.

The majority of students (twelve) wanted to finish secondary school and proceed to university courses. Their career ambitions included, among the females, law, computer desk top publishing, science degree, social work, and one was unsure. The males who wanted to go on to university identified medicine, mathematics and computer programming as fields of interest. Other males identified professional sport and music as their preferred careers.

Three males identified apprenticeships as their preferred career options. Two wanted to complete Year 10 or Year 11 and then proceed to TAFE in order to complete courses towards apprenticeships in mechanics and plumbing. A third male also wanted to undertake an apprenticeship in mechanics but the pathway to this for him was less clear than for the other males. Most of the males in the group were unaware of what traineeships were and what they involved. When the nature of this form of training and work experience was explained to them, apprenticeships remained the preferred option.

On the other hand, none of the females identified apprenticeships or traineeships as a preferred career path. In fact, they did not mention this type of structured training at all during our discussions. For them, completing VCE and then entering university was the only obvious pathway to employment and to realising their career ambitions.

Staying at school - barriers and supports

The pressures on the students which made it difficult to stay at school differed between the two groups.

For the males, school was more likely to get in the way of their hobbies and sporting interests because of the demands of homework. For one male though, school was stressful because of parental expectations. He said, *'my parents want me to study hard to go to uni...sometimes the work is hard and parents put pressure on me'*.

The females were more likely to experience the pressures of juggling their school work demands with their work demands at home. One female said, *'I am the only girl in the house now and I have got so much responsibilities and everything'*. The expectation to contribute to the running of the household was also described by one student who lived in a sole parent family. She stated,

'It's only me and my mum. When I turned 16 she went onto the dole and got off the pension. Now she's started her own business. She is not the type to get up in the morning and do stuff. Now I have to do all the outside business. After school I have to go to the Post Office and pay bills and stuff. I do all the outside work. But she pays me to do it. That's my job. I do all the housework plus my homework. So everything is left on me because she is the one who brings the money in. I get about \$100 per week including my Austudy. So I basically get \$25 from her. I'm working for my money but I like that. I can't just sit around and do nothing'.

While there were apparently greater parental expectations on daughters to contribute to the household chores than there were for sons, of all the students consulted, only two of the eight males compared to four of the six females lived in sole parent families. Together with traditional views about housework being woman's work, the prevalence of sole parent families among the females may have contributed to the expectation that daughters help around the house.

While parental expectations were a source of some stress in terms of expectations to achieve at school and to help at home, families were nonetheless identified by students irrespective of their gender as a main source of support to stay at school. One female student explained the important influence of family on the decision to stay or leave school,

'they are very important because, like, if your parents say 'oh, don't go to school', you are going to stay at home. Families are by you all the time. They stick by you'.

Friends were also an important source of support. One female student explained, *'if you don't have any friends it's very difficult to cope because when you get to VCE you need someone to support you'*. Not having any friends can be a catalyst for leaving the school.

The way individual teachers were regarded by the students was important in terms of encouraging their interest in school. For example, the way teachers taught could make a subject interesting and stimulating or boring and unexciting. In terms of personal support and rapport, teachers were more likely to be identified as a source of support for older students in Year 11 or Year 12 who were undertaking more demanding VCE requirements than for younger students in Year 10.

However, the Student Services Coordinator and the Future Options Coordinator were clearly identified as important and useful avenues of personal support at school.

Why some people leave and what would be helpful if they did

Most of the students knew of others who had left school before Year 12 or some had themselves considered leaving school. Their reasons for leaving were varied. Some of the female students' comments included:

'I thought of leaving to get revenge on my mum'.

'I thought of leaving but then I thought of my future and I wanted to make my parents proud'.

'I wanted to leave, to go to another school, because of problems with friends'.

Four of the eight males had considered leaving to pursue their career interests. One wanted to leave to go overseas to try out for a European soccer club in order to become a professional soccer player. Another stated, *'I am thinking about leaving in Year 11 because you need Year 11 to go to TAFE. I want to be a mechanic'.*

Those who had considered leaving said they would discuss their plans with their parents, their older siblings or their older friends.

The school programs or supports they identified as helpful included the new Future Options course which would teach them job search skills and provide them with information regarding appropriate courses for their own career interests. This course is optional and had the most appeal for those students who did not want to go on to university.

Work experience was also considered a useful program through the school. For some it meant an opportunity to try out a job in their area of interest, for others it meant a possible opportunity for part-time work. One male student who wanted to go on to TAFE to complete a course towards an apprenticeship stated that he wanted to undertake work experience in a supermarket, work which was unrelated to his ambition, *'because sometimes they give you part-time work'* and this would help to fund his studies at TAFE. That is, he saw work experience as an opportunity to find part-time work.

Summary and implications for the project

All the young people consulted recognised the importance of completing secondary school for their future employment and career prospects. Of all the students consulted, only two boys stated that they would leave school before completing Year 12 in order to commence apprenticeship training through TAFE.

Career ambitions among female students usually involved undertaking university degrees, and were unlikely to involve an apprenticeship or a traineeship. The male students identified both tertiary training and apprenticeships as possible pathways to employment. Traineeships were unattractive to the males and they knew little about the structure or requirements of this form of training. This suggests that further information regarding traineeships would be helpful for all students. Females in particular would benefit from more information about structured training opportunities beyond tertiary education.

The female students were more likely to experience the pressures of juggling the demands of school work with demands at home to help out, while for the males, school work was more likely to interfere with their hobby and sporting interests. Sport was not mentioned at all by the females.

Family and friends were the two main sources of support to stay on at school. While family was for some a source of pressure in terms of their expectations on students to achieve, they were also the mainstay for most. This suggests that the family has a central role to play in assisting young people to remain at school or to support them in their pathways to employment and independence when they decide to leave. This involves being able to provide financial support to the young person during their education, but this also has implications for the Transition project in terms of the Project Officer working with young people and their families before and after the leaving school.

Part three: Service delivery issues

This part of the report outlines the model of service delivery in the Transition Project and provides an overview of the issues in project implementation raised by BSC and BSL staff consulted for this report. All those who participated in designing and implementing the project at BSC were interviewed in August including the Student Welfare Coordinator, Work Education Coordinator, Future Options Officer, and former VCE/VET Coordinator from BSC; and Services Development Coordinator, Deputy Manager Employment Action Centre, and Transition Project Officer from BSL.

The concluding section identifies lessons from the project for future implementation.

Service delivery model

It is planned that the Project Officer works with BSC staff and up to 20 students in one year to identify and implement strategies to assist those young people who leave before completing Year 12, but focussing on those who leave during Year 10 or Year 11. She is located at the school 3 days per week and her primary role will be to provide intensive case management for the young people who decide to leave school early, and to work closely with other agencies in the region providing related service, to ensure a range of options are offered. Identification of appropriate vocational options for the young people will also be an essential part of the worker's role.

The Transition Project has been designed to explore a bridging process which commences at school and continues into a training and work placement where possible. This involves supporting young people during the period when they leave school and establish themselves in the labour market and the broader community. Within the project, there is the opportunity for the training provider (the BSL) to:

- establish contact with the young person while they are still at school and assist them in identifying a vocational pathway;
- work with the school and family, where appropriate, to enhance preparation for undertaking that pathway;
- provide information on community services and resources at the time the young person leaves school;
- maintain an ongoing relationship with the young person during the period between leaving school and commencing in employment and/or training; and to
- provide mentor support to the young person during the initial stage of becoming involved in either employment and/or training (*source: Brief project model 30/7/97, p.3*).

Case management

A major component of the project is a case management approach to responding to the needs of the young people. It is expected that the model will be refined and developed as the project is further operationalised. This section of the report identifies the stages of the approach which have been outlined by the Project Officer (*source: Project Officer's developmental work on the service delivery model*), and documents comments by BSL and BSC staff regarding their experiences of actual implementation. Provided at the end of this section is a summary of central issues and concerns raised by staff during the consultations for further discussion by the Coordinating and School-based Committees.

Target group - 'The target group for this project are young people who are still at school, but who are likely to leave school before completing Year 12 and who are at risk of long-term unemployment and restricted training options unless linked into a training environment such as that offered by a traineeship or other vocational activities' (*source: Agreement*).

By July 1997, 13 referrals had been discussed at case-conferencing meetings (see below), including 3 female and 10 male students. Seven of these were in Year 10, 5 in Year 11 and 1 unknown at the time of interviews with staff associated with the project. In general terms, young people considered for the project have been mainly from non-English speaking background and most also had refugee backgrounds. They tended to have extensive ESL, literacy and numeracy needs as well as being from low-income family backgrounds. These students have not necessarily stated that they wanted to leave school, and their recommendation to the project seems to have been made because of the student's inability to cope academically.

Staff consulted differed on how well they considered the target group for the project had been defined. One person thought it had been well-defined and it had been discussed a lot. She described the target group as '*as those students who had both feet out the door and were running*'. Most agreed that the target group had been well-defined, but that the definition was shifting or that there remains some contention about who it should include, especially whether the students who had left school this year should be followed-up. One staff member consulted for the report stated that the target group is

'probably not well defined. It needs more clarification from experience and finding out why young people are leaving and when that decision is well-informed...whether it is their own decision to leave or if it is triggered by a specific problem'.

Suggestions by staff during the consultations about the target group are summarised below.

- The most appropriate target would be the young person who is firm about leaving and wants to access a traineeship.
- The project should work with:
 - ⇒ those students who 'disappear' during the school year,
 - ⇒ those students who stayed at school to do vocational subjects but by Year 11 are struggling academically, and
 - ⇒ those students who are 'hanging around' with no other options, unclear of their direction and just getting by.

- The project should have three components:
 - ⇒ formal caseload of young people who need ongoing follow-up and are identified through the case-conferencing process (see below),
 - ⇒ informal contact with students who can just drop in, and
 - ⇒ project type work with young people who have already left school.
- The School-based Implementation and Coordinating Committees should examine the ability of the program to deal with students with low levels of English language and literacy competence who may not be able to undertake structured training in a traineeship. That is, that alternative or complementary approaches may need to be developed for this group of students.

Referral source - Initially, possible referrals to the project were from teachers, parents or students themselves. But, by July 1997 referral sources for the project had included the Student Services Coordinator, the Future Options Coordinator (previously Student at Risk Project Officer), and team leaders. The proforma for referral identifies the student name, date, referral source and reasons for referral. This form is used as the basis for discussing the appropriateness of the project for each student and setting priorities in case-conferencing.

All staff interviewed for this report agreed that the referral sources for the project should be increased and, in particular, the opportunity for 'self-referral' by students to the project should be enhanced. They considered that in order to achieve a widening of the referral sources the profile of the project within the school should be increased and promoted.

Case-conferencing - The purpose of the case-conferencing is to select potentially appropriate students for the project by discussing each student and additional assistance they may be receiving in the school. Therefore, the case-conferencing group screens referrals for participation in the project without the young people present. The group has met approximately fortnightly since May 1997 to discuss referral and case-conferencing.

In order to restrict the number of meetings required of project staff, the School-based Committee (excluding the BSL Research Officer) began meeting as the case-conferencing group. It includes the Student Services Coordinator, the VCE/VET Coordinator, Work Education Coordinator, ESL teacher, Future Options Officer, and Transition Project Officer.

The case-conferencing process was regarded by the staff consulted as working quite well in that it identified students who were ineligible for the project because they could be or were being assisted in existing programs such as the Future Options classes. Reasons for acceptance or non-acceptance in the project by the case-conferencing group are noted on the referral proforma, 'Student details'.

By July 1997, five of the original 13 referrals to the case-conferencing group were not referred to the Project Officer for follow-up. Reasons for this included that they were considered more appropriate for other school-based programs such as more structured tutorial support due to academic difficulties, or due to extensive welfare issues more appropriately dealt with through the Student Services Coordinator, or that they had not indicated that they wanted to leave.

An additional purpose of the case-conferencing group identified by one staff member consulted is to assist the Project Officer to identify strategies for contacting students. It was this aspect of the case-conferencing process which proved most problematic and unclear from the perspective of some staff. To date, it has been intended that the Project Officer contact students through the team

leader who had made the referral. Comments offered during the consultations about student follow-up after case-conferencing are summarised below.

- The process after case-conferencing is unclear and more flexibility is needed for the Project Officer to contact students directly.
- The process for the worker contacting students needs to be clarified. Someone in the school needs to facilitate the worker meeting team leaders.
- *'It is odd to take someone out of a class who doesn't know they have been referred. Ideally the person who has made the referral would take the student to meet the (Transition) worker'.*
- *'The worker makes contact with the student through a case-conferencing group member or finding them herself. I'd like to see this wind down a little so that the worker is integrated as a full .6 resource. Kids should be aware of her presence or role'.*

Project intake - Students assessed by the case conferencing group as eligible for the program are referred to the Project Officer for interview. Their participation in the project is voluntary. The purpose of the interview is to build rapport, to confirm details on the referral form, and to gather additional more personal information if the student feels comfortable. To date, the Transition Project Officer has collected information from teachers and confirmed this with the students.

Initially, eligibility for the project was determined according to 'absenteeism, formal exit applications, loss of contact with students, self-referral, students wanting to job search while still at school, or intensive support needs that time restrictions do not enable school staff to provide ie. welfare support outside of school' (*source: Project Officer notes*).

By July 1997, 8 of the original 13 referrals to case-conferencing group had been referred to the Transition Project for follow-up by the Project Officer. These included 7 males and 1 female. Referrals to the project have been based on absenteeism and academic skills. One person commented, *'the referrals have been young people who can't cope rather than those who have made a decision to leave'*. These eight referrals were in different stages of follow-up by the Project Officer at the time of interview.

Assessment - 'During the assessment, student interests, ambitions, current skill levels, skill and experience gaps, and non-work related support needs will be established. This will be done via the initial referral form and the assessment form that is completed with the worker during the intake stage' (*source: Project Officer notes*).

Assessment is an ongoing process because as students become more familiar with the worker and more at ease it is likely that they will be more willing to reveal information about themselves.

A comprehensive client assessment could include: crisis intervention needs, basic needs, goals, existing support networks, general and/or survival skills, day-to-day living needs, employment needs, education needs, transport needs, medical/dental/mental health needs, social skills, child-care needs, legal needs (*source: Project Officer notes*).

Case Planning - 'The planning process includes relationship building and goal setting. An agreed action plan is developed between the worker and the student. This process may involve other relevant school staff and, when appropriate, student parents. In consultation with the key players a service strategy relevant to the young person's vocational and personal needs will be developed' (*source: Project Officer notes*).

Implementation

The program elements which could be used to assist young people according to their needs were identified by the Project Worker and are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Possible strategies for supporting young people

Strategies to remain at school	Strategies to assist transition from school	Strategies after school and when unemployed	Strategies when employed or in training
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identifying appropriate referrals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> job searching, application letters, interview skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> out reach - contact students who have left & lost contact with school; link to EAC community programs and/or training; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> on-the-job visits additional tutoring
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reorganising courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> vocational guidance, work observation, work experience, contact with employer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> maintain contact; personal support; living skills; employment related skills; community participation; referral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> access to clothing library
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> work experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> linkages to group training co's for traineeships/apprenticeships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> job searching - weekly group activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> monitoring and mentoring
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> linkages to community supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> direct liaison with EAC's GTC 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> advocacy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> intensive educational support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CES and DSS 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> employer mediation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> alternative schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> housing, community supports 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> mediation between school &/or family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> liaison with TAFE, SkillShare 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> counselling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> family mediation personal development health services 		

Exit - 'Exit from the project should be determined by whether the agreed goal has been reached and maintained. Participants have the right to exit when they decide they no longer wish to take part. Each exit should be discussed with the case conferencing group and recorded. It is important that an open door policy exists for participants who exit the program. Those who do exit, whether it be that a positive outcome has been reached or participants voluntarily exit, are encouraged to return to the program, either at the school if appropriate or through programs at the EAC' (*source- Project Officer notes*).

Overview of issues in project implementation

BSC and BSL staff consulted for this report were quite positive about the opportunities provided by the Transition Project. They saw a number of potential advantages in the project including:

- to provide direct support and assistance to a small group of young people particularly in terms of linking young people who exit the school into further training or work,
- an opportunity for school and community collaboration which will inform the partner agencies,
- an opportunity to identify alternative models of practice for people working with young people, and
- a capacity to influence government to better address the needs of young people who leave school early.

Specific issues about the operation of the project identified through the consultations are reported here for consideration by the School-based Implementation and the Coordinating Committees. Some of these issues were noted above in discussion of service delivery arrangements and additional comments are also noted.

1. Committee

During the early phases of the project from February 1997 to July 1997, it appears that the School-based Committee became focussed on ensuring referrals to the project through case-conferencing rather than continuing to address aspects of project operationalisation. While the case-conferencing process is well supported by staff, there were some concerns that too little time is given to discussing and addressing aspects of project implementation and strategies within the school. Therefore, it is proposed that:

The School-based Committee re-commences regular meetings to discuss Transition Project implementation issues. Pre-set meeting times, perhaps monthly, should be negotiated by the committee members so that opportunities for participation are maximised. In addition, standard meeting procedures should be adopted including an agreed agenda and record of minutes (at least of agreed action) in order to ensure that there is an understanding of tasks which have been agreed and who has responsibility for follow-up.

There are a number of issues in aspects of service delivery emerging from the consultation process for this report which should be addressed by the School-based Committee. These are related to identification of target group and referral processes.

2. Target group issues

Clearer definition of the target group is needed in terms of further defining the characteristics of the young people who choose to leave and are at risk of not continuing on to training or employment. Consideration should be given to the following issues in particular:

- how to make the model appropriate for young people with very low levels of English language and literacy skills;
- the inclusion of young people who have ‘recently’ left the school and appropriate parameters set for this; and
- issues of gender representation, ie. whether there are particular reasons for the apparent under-representation of young women.

3. Referral issues

All staff consulted for the project agreed that there should be greater opportunities for self-referral by students to the project, and therefore that the profile of the project within the school should be enhanced to promote this. The School-based Committee should:

- examine the opportunities and constraints for self-referral to the project by students,
- design an appropriate strategy for raising the profile of the project within the school among students, teachers and the School Council, and
- identify who has responsibility for this. (If the Transition Project Officer has responsibility for this, consideration will need to be given to how she can be supported and facilitated to undertake this task within the school).

4. Student follow-up

Clear processes for the Transition Project Officer will be necessary in order to follow-up students who continue to be referred to the project by team leaders and other staff through the case-conferencing process. Therefore, it is proposed that:

The School-based Committee should assist the Transition Project Officer to identify appropriate ways to contact students who have been referred indirectly to the project by team leaders or other teaching staff not directly involved in the project.

A number of additional issues relevant to the Transition Project more broadly were raised by staff consulted for this report. These relate to project management and communication issues. These issues are listed here as questions which should be addressed by the School-based Committee and/or Coordinating Committee.

5. Project management

Who has ultimate responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the project? It is unclear to some BSC staff who in the BSL is the primary contact for the project if issues about the project arise which are beyond the responsibility of the Project Officer.

Who is the central support and contact for the Transition Project Officer while located at BSC? A primary contact at BSC for the Project Officer should be identified in order to facilitate an understanding of school processes and appropriate activities within the school.

6. Communication

What are BSC staff expectations of the Transition Project Officer regarding letting staff and students know when she is available or when and where she can be contacted? Suggestions about this included that the project worker let the Office know her movements or leaving a note on the office door.

Issues associated with ‘communication’ were also identified during the staff consultations. These difficulties seemed to be associated with the lack of opportunity for formal project discussion at the School-based Committee because of the focus on case-conferencing, the concomitant lack of clarity about some aspects of service delivery, or due to misunderstandings, and the pressures of time because of heavy work demands. It is expected that some of these ‘communication’ issues will recede as the School-based Committee meets more often and when central BSC and BSL staff are clearly nominated to provide specific input into aspects of the project as they arise.

7. Agreement between agencies

BSL and BSC staff associated with establishing the project at BSC had different views about the usefulness and appropriateness of the final ‘Agreement between the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Brunswick Secondary College regarding the Transition Project’. According to some involved in the discussions, the process was protracted and drawn out. However, some also viewed the process as useful in order to explore and define roles, expectations, working conditions, parameters and limitations, meeting personnel, becoming familiar with styles, personalities and understandings.

For staff who did not believe that the final product is a useful document, their concerns reflected a confusion about whether the Agreement was a statement of values or if it was a legally binding and formal document which sets out grievance procedures, exit clauses, confidentiality requirements and public liability in order to protect the agencies. One person stated this confusion as the *‘difference between seeing the Agreement as a legal contract or a looser roles and responsibilities agreement’*. Another person felt that it was useful to be clear about the extent of service delivery, but that the Agreement was also a vehicle for BSL control of the project. As one staff member said, *‘the test of the pudding will be in the eating’*.

Lessons from the project

This final section of the report summarises some of the lessons from the Transition Project to date which may assist future service development within the project and also other projects between a school and community agency like the BSL.

1. BSC and BSL staff consulted for the report recognised the potential difficulties associated with two agencies with different ‘cultures’ working closely together in a partnership project. Aspects of the relationship which seem to facilitate project implementation include:
 - Clarity about the person in each agency who has decision making authority, and limiting the number of people who are involved in establishing the project.
 - Frank and open discussions and being clear about organisational objectives and motives; flexibility and empathy in dealing with different agency structures; preparedness to listen and learn from each other.
 - Preparedness to contribute resources and personnel.

- Shared goals and common purposes, for example, both agencies working to assist young people who are disadvantaged.
2. An introductory period of project clarification has been important, however, the usefulness of the formal Agreement is unproven. It is necessary to be clear about the purpose of reaching a signed Agreement between the partner agencies. Is the Agreement a legally binding document which provides protection to the participating organisations, or is it a statement of shared understandings, values, roles and responsibilities, or are two separate processes required?
 3. Clear project management arrangements are important to ensure responsiveness to issues as they arise. This involves clarity in who has ultimate responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the project and who is the central project contact in each agency in order to support the Project Officer through unfamiliar processes and structures.
 4. A committee comprising representatives from the partner agencies needs to meet regularly, perhaps fortnightly initially and then less frequently, in order to determine project directions, strategies and processes. Decisions about aspects of the project and responsibilities need to be documented to minimise misunderstandings and ‘communication’ difficulties between staff associated with the project.

References

Walker, C 1996a, *City of Moreland Monthly Demographic Profile: Education in Moreland*, Moreland City Council, Melbourne.

Walker, C 1996b, *Snapshot of the City of Moreland: Key characteristics of Moreland’s population*, Moreland City Council, Melbourne.