

Players United

Players United was created to assist vulnerable youth to develop skills to overcome the challenges faced by adolescents and help them establish future employment pathways. This program has built partnerships with local schools and training agencies to re-engage disengaged, and 'at risk' youth.

The program was developed from a need to address drug use, bullying and violence in young people.

The Players United Program specifically develops leadership, coaching, and sports skills to connect participants' with the community, and develop transferable life skills.

The delivery of the program allows the individual learning needs of young people to be addressed by allocating different assessment tasks to different learning potentials.

Project Partners/ Key stakeholders

Greater Dandenong Community Health Service

Carwatha College staff, students, parents, families and community members

Keysborough Learning Centre –Community VCAL

Guest Speakers – Football Victoria

Cricket Victoria

What has been the integrated health promotion response?

Strategies and interventions used:

The program remains relatively simple and is based on the sports training concept of "game sense", a training approach that emphasises practical thinking. The program is primarily based on "fitting the young people" rather than attempting to fit young people into a fixed program mould. **This is achieved by adapting the teaching methods to address the various sensory modes in which people learn, including auditory, visual and kinaesthetic.** This has been a key element to the ongoing success of the program.

To encourage and develop participant ownership, one of the first sessions involved the students establishing their own code of conduct and deciding on their own group name.

To ensure that the target group was included and their needs met, the program in its early days was evaluated internally by program staff and partners. **Student needs, expectations and level of satisfaction** were measured through a number of means. School executives and welfare staff were incorporated into planning activities to identify the needs of the students. Student and staff expectations were gathered through pre-program meetings and interviews, **whilst the level of student satisfaction was measured** through post-program written and verbal evaluation activities. A number of staff forums were also conducted at the conclusion of the program involving both school and agency staff.

The program recognised that previous programs attempting to engage this targeted cohort faced a number of barriers. Firstly, they relied on taking the young people out of the environment they were most comfortable in. Secondly, they did not provide immediate success and gratification, thereby being seen as “too hard”. Thirdly, it was seen that disengaged young people needed to make an enormous leap, socially, academically and emotionally to be re-engaged in learning activities, particularly in a TAFE or ACE environment.

To start with, the program simply linked local sports coaches into after school sports programs. As the demand became greater and the benefits more obvious, the program developed to the point where it is now - delivering a range of sports leadership training activities to both primary and secondary school aged young people in the City of Greater Dandenong.

Initially Players United was operating under the Sport for all Project. After operating for a number of years, the Sport for all Project was reviewed and updated into – *Players United*. Greater Dandenong Community Health Service Youth Programs still at the helm, and sports still the medium, the Players United Sports Leadership program began to build partnerships with local schools and Training Agencies to re-engage disengaged and ‘at risk’ youth through:

- Exploring and developing life skills through a series of leadership and sport training sessions that ultimately assist young people to move into further education through a variety of training opportunities
- Working within a school curriculum to create experiential learning experiences for young people and encourage their connection to school
- Strengthening links into recognised support networks (e.g. schools and local support agencies) to enhance students, and their families, connection to their community
- Having agency and school staff working alongside each other and creating a two way learning experience for staff whilst maximising learning for students by recognising different learning styles
- Creating a sustainable model of delivery by training the school staff to continue to deliver the program after the agency support has left
- Allowing young people to be able to mature and gain confidence whilst working with peer support in a familiar environment
- Encouraging past participants to act as mentors and support for current participants

What are the impacts?

Players United is operating now in a number of sites across the City of Greater Dandenong.

Skills taught and learnt in the Players United program are mapped back into Certificate 1 Coaching Principals, thereby providing a foundation for participants to go on to secure further qualifications in their chosen sports modality. Linkages into further training in the Sports and Recreation area also exist through core skills provided to allow participants to consider undertaking a Certificate II in Sports and Recreation.

Evaluations to date have indicated strong potential for ongoing sustainability including the inclusion of the program into school curriculums. The overall impact to participants' has been improved mental health and wellbeing, as well as increased physical activity.

This evaluation of the Players United program indicated the following positive and measurable impacts:

- A major strength was the working relationships that were developed from the partnership which linked youth workers seamlessly into a school based program;
 - Teachers and youth workers were able to learn new skills from each other AND the partnership between the City of Greater Dandenong Community Health Centre Youth Services Team and the School was beneficial to both agencies;
 - The team teaching approach gave a different and more inclusive learning dynamic which worked well with the students;
 - Moving away from traditional English into a more practical style of learning allowed for the development of essential life skills
- ~~• Shift in student behaviour exhibited within the classrooms take out~~
- Increase in students project and time management skills as well as self esteem
 - Increase connection between students and staff
Teachers noted: 'There were significant shifts in communication and confidence within the young peoples behaviour.'
 - Teacher attitudes were changed due to their involvement in delivering Players United and by them seeing the changes in the young men.
 - Different teaching and learning styles have resulted. Teachers are currently exploring new opportunities to enhance the learning outcomes for students next year when they are delivering the Players United program.
 - Increased attendance from students noted by staff
 - The program achieved its goals of bringing together Carwatha College staff, students, parents, families and community members in the final event and having a positive impact on all involved.

Social Ventures Australia support has also led to a full evaluation of the marketing materials needed to develop the project, the planning of a promotional video for potential school, community and agency partners and the development of a product establishment and branding process. Part of the work has also included project evaluation processes, including formal evaluations, with key stake holders to evaluate processes that worked when the program was delivered and to identify areas for improvement. Evaluation has also included pre and post program survey of students and teachers.

What's next?

One school, Carwatha College in Noble Park, has been so struck by the success and strength of the program that it has incorporated the program in full into its English Curriculum for 2009

The Players United program undergoes continuous internal evaluation and is, increasingly, opening up to external evaluation. Evaluations to date have indicated a strong potential for ongoing and sustainable delivery not only in the Dandenong area but much further a field.

Other steps towards sustainability and expansion include working on training packages to support the training of program facilitators and discussion on the process for linking the program formally into Certificate I in Coaching Principles and Certificate II in Sport and Recreation.

Parallel discussions are being held with the Local Learning and Employment Network and partners in placing a version of the Players United program into schools as a "pre-VETiS" program, that is, a program to support and develop targeted students prior to their selection of a Vocational Education and Training program at year 10 or year 11 levels. There are also partnership discussions with the LLEN on linking the Players United initiative to sporting initiatives being considered by the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues.

The peak body for sports in Victoria, Sports and Recreation Victoria, has also included the Players United program and program model in their five year strategic plan, citing its great value in introducing young people to sport and the linking of sport and personal development for young people.

Further information

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Southern Health

The logo for Southern Health, featuring the words "Southern Health" in a blue, serif font. A blue curved line is positioned underneath the word "Health".