Doing Positive Things:  
“You have to go out and do it”

Outcomes for Participants in Youth Development Programs

A Report of a Three Year Longitudinal Study

Carried out by the Australian Youth Research Centre

For the Australian Government Youth Bureau,  
Department of Family and Community Services

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The Longitudinal Study of Participants in Youth Development Programs was commissioned by the Youth Bureau in the Australian Government’s Department of Family and Community Services and conducted by the Australian Youth Research Centre at The University of Melbourne. It followed a group of young people on their journeys in state-sponsored youth development programs throughout 2002-2004, to “capture anecdotal evidence about changes [in behaviour, attitudes and characteristics] in a small group of young people participating in youth development activities.”

A total of 145 young people from 18 programs in three states (South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia) were involved in individual interviews. In addition, group interviews were conducted with other young program participants, and with teachers and program providers.

The youth development programs on which this research is based are sponsored or supported by Australian State Governments, occur in or in association with schools, and involve community-based program providers. While there are significant differences in their structures, requirements, emphases and approaches there are also similarities between these State Programs. All:

- are open to all young people;
- aim to achieve specific and positive outcomes or growth for participants: development of skills, knowledge and attitudes;
- focus on learning through experience: active, hands-on learning; involve young people in active program and decision-making roles;
- support young people’s involvement outside schools - in the wider community; and
- have schools and community groups working together to provide the program.

The research reports under three major headings: the nature and use of outcomes for program participants; the links between these outcomes and program approaches; and implications for program operations.

Outcomes

The research tracked changes reported in outcomes for students in the following areas: knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours, teamwork, community service, leadership, individual responsibility, self-discipline and confidence. It firstly found that young people in these programs reported strong improvements in all the outcome areas tracked, though they anticipated and hoped for greater outcomes. Their biggest improvements (in order) were in their skills, knowledge, confidence and teamwork. There was less improvement reported in the areas of leadership, individual responsibility and community service.

While young people saw improvement in their overall skills as their largest overall outcome, they also saw it as being greater than they had predicted before the programs started. It was the only outcome area that exhibited such a consistent overall increase. While young people also saw that ‘knowledge’ outcomes were consistently achieved, outcomes in this area were less than they had anticipated.

There were also valuable reported outcomes of these programs in the areas of personal and social skills such as teamwork and leadership, and in personal development: confidence, self-esteem and cooperation. Young people, teachers and provider staff emphasised the value of young people learning to understand each other as people. Their ability to do this helped them to develop skills in teamwork and cooperation, promoted tolerance, and built trust among group members.
While many of the young people had a positive and inclusive sense of community, their outcomes in community service remained the lowest of all the areas examined throughout the study. These programs most frequently construct connection to community as ‘community service’; ‘helping others’, ‘volunteerism’ or ‘service learning’ rather than ‘community development’ or ‘community capacity building’. Young people learn that they are servers rather than shapers of community.

There were often substantial differences between what young people expected from these programs and what they experienced. For example, in almost all the outcomes examined, young people rated the importance of that outcome as higher than its actual occurrence within their program.

The reasons that young people chose to undertake the youth development programs focused on what they would be doing (e.g. their enjoyment of the activities) and, in many situations, on the practical skills they would be learning, rather than on the longer term benefits such as ‘certificates’ and ‘help getting a job’ (though these aspects were more emphasised by schools and programs).

Secondly, young people thought that what they gained through their involvement in the youth development programs was practical and useful beyond the programs. The programs provided a context in which skills and attitudes could be tested and recognised in real situations. While for most of these young people there had been limited time and opportunities within the time period of this study to exhibit use of outcomes outside school, some reported that they had used the knowledge, skills and attitudes they developed in the program in various ways, including in gaining employment.

In follow-up interviews, approximately one third of the young people reported that their youth development program had assisted them in gaining employment – mainly in part-time work. While young people strongly believed that helping to get a job and providing certification were important aspects of programs, the large majority of young people did not believe employment outcomes were the main purpose of the programs. The exception was that of young people in the defence force cadets, where involvement in a cadets program was seen as a direct step into being accepted into the defence forces.

The application of the knowledge, skills and attitudes developed within these programs can influence on-going learning, and have a broader impact on participants’ lives, and on their relationship with other young people. Some young people were reported to have taken on leadership roles in schools and community groups following their participation in youth development programs; this was attributed to the acquisition of new skills, and opportunities to apply them in different situations.

For some young people, the program had a positive impact on their decisions about staying at school. Participation made the school experience more enjoyable and built a sense of belonging to the peer group, and this influenced a later decision to stay at school.

Thirdly, this research noted program outcomes for schools, individual teachers and community-based program providers. A strong social justice focus emerged in both schools’ and individual teachers’ reasons for being involved in youth development programs. Teachers stressed that the funding of a program was important, so that the activities could be provided as part of the school’s curriculum at little or no cost to young people and their families. This meant that young people who might not otherwise have been able to afford to participate in these activities, were able to be included in the program.

Teachers also reported positive outcomes for themselves in different and improved relationships with young people and in changes to their approaches to teaching.

**Program approaches**

The research reports how the above outcomes were shaped by the approaches that youth development programs adopted or developed in areas of recruitment and inclusion, learning approaches including community involvement, youth participation in program decision-making, and relationships between community-based program providers and schools.

For young people, these youth development programs were substantially different from their regular school programs in terms of teaching and learning approaches. The main differences identified by young people related to the diverse ‘hands-on’ and ‘practical’ activities offered by the
Youth development programs, meaningful connections of those activities to everyday realities, and the provision of opportunities for active youth participation. All these features were attractive to young people and were seen as enhancing learning outcomes.

The picture of an effective program that emerged through young people’s voices was of activities that were fun, that involved hands-on learning – often outside the school, that encouraged new relationships with people, and over which they exercised some control or influence. Activities that involved doing things that helped the community, and also activities that involved camps, were important but were not currently stressed enough. While wearing uniforms was sometimes a component of learning approaches, this was not regarded by young people to be as important as some teachers and program providers felt it was.

Secondly, young people indicated that doing things that helped the community was important to them as a learning approach but that it occurred far less often than they would like. Doing things ‘for the community’ (i.e. community service) was more important than doing things ‘in’, or ‘with’ the community, or learning ‘about’ the community. The most common description they gave of community was something that they ‘serve’ rather than something they ‘belong to’ or can influence. However, they said that all these opportunities for community involvement occurred less than they would have liked.

Thirdly, the degree of active youth participation in program decision-making was one of the defining characteristics of youth development programs and an important predictor of the success of these programs, as perceived by young people. It was included both as a desirable outcome, and as an intentional learning approach of the programs. While such participation was central to the goals of some programs, in others it was seen primarily as ‘instrumental’ in achieving other goals.

This research strongly suggests a link between young people’s outcomes and the level of their participation in decision-making in the program. Those who indicated high or shared participation, also consistently rated their overall program outcomes as greater. Further, those who experienced lesser participation in program decision-making also reported greater differences between what they experienced and what they would like to have included within programs.

Fourthly, this study indicates that, where the provider and the school worked in partnership, the programs were stronger, the opportunities provided to young people were enriched, and there were better outcomes for young people. Programs based on partnerships were most likely to achieve community support and sustained success. Partnerships in youth development programs were important because of the coherence and agreement they enabled between program objectives and other aspects. They improved program quality and delivery through what each partner brought to the program, and provided benefits for each of the partners.

Implementation

The research identifies a lack of evidence of explicit and documented aims and objectives by programs as of concern. Similarly, there was little evidence of formal processes for the recording of the outcomes and benefits for young people against aims and objectives at the local program level. The challenges to programs of measuring benefits for young people and for institutions were daunting ones for most staff. They did not see themselves as sufficiently resourced with knowledge, skills, time or funds to do this in an effective way, and requested support in the development of tools and processes.

Secondly, the nature of the relationships between schools and community program providers were highly variable, with many programs operating in schools independent of strong and continuing community links.

Suggestions for improved program operation and for areas for further research are included in the Report of this research for consideration by local programs, State Programs and the Australian Government.
This first section of the Report provides a context for the research from the international and national literature around youth development. Australian policy development and national involvement in this area is outlined. It then summarises the history and current situation of the three State Programs whose examples are represented in this study.

This report presents the results of a three-year longitudinal study of outcomes for young participants in State Government-sponsored youth development programs. Details of the study and its outcomes are also provided in a Technical Report available at the FACS website.

This first section of the report provides a brief background and overview of the ideas and policies around youth development. It places the study and its results within the context of more general concepts and arguments about youth development.

What is youth development?

In its broadest sense, youth development occurs naturally all the time as young people grow and develop. It happens in all sorts of places and times: individually, in homes, in schools, in community groups. As a more formal process, it also happens in many deliberate ways within these areas, particularly within schools. However, a specific area of program work under the title of ‘youth development’ has emerged in Australia over the past decade, though its existence has been recognised here and internationally for a much longer period of time.

Youth development has been described as a “holistic, systems and strengths based approach to working with young people” (National Network for Youth (USA) in Lane, 1996). The concept is one approach to the assertion that the development of young people through a crucial stage of their lives requires planned action. Such action could focus on problems of and presented by young people – on what young people lack (i.e. a deficit approach) – or it could focus on building young people’s strengths. This latter or ‘positive youth development’ approach:

- embodies the valuing of and respect for young people;
- addresses the whole person rather than an aspect; and
- involves families, communities and other systems of support to create ‘healthy’ young people, strong families and responsible communities. (Ausyouth, 2002a: p.3)

Internationally, underlying aspects of Youth Development Programs have been identified as providing:

- stable places where young people can feel safe;
- access to basic care and services;
- high quality instruction and training;
- sustained, caring and healthy relationships with peers and adults;
- high expectations and standards;
- role models, resources and networks; and
- challenging experiences and opportunities to participate (IYF, 1999).

The USA National Youth Development Information Center offered the following definition of youth development in early 2000, which was then approved by the USA National Collaboration for Youth Members Executive:
Youth development: A process which prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically and cognitively competent. Positive youth development addresses the broader developmental needs of youth, in contrast to deficit-based models, which focus solely on youth problems.  

In Australia, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) also adopted this definition in March 2000 (MCEETYA, 2000).

The immediate impetus for the development of such programs has been the work of non-school agencies such as the International Youth Foundation (see http://www.iyfnet.org for example). However, there has also been a long history of similar ideas in schools in Australia, where holistic, respectful and relevant curriculum approaches have been adopted, and where the importance of supportive relationships and community-based learning has been acknowledged. (For research on the importance of supportive relationships within schools, see ACEE and AYRC, 2001; for documentation of programs emphasising ‘active student participation’ since 1979, see Connect magazine; for Community Based Learning approaches, see Cumming, 1999). There have also been long-standing partnerships between schools and community agencies in curriculum development and implementation. Groups such as the Red Cross, for example, have nationally extended their involvement with the Student Community Involvement Program (SCIP) to their Community Challenge, which provides both a focus and a structure to such activities. Other long-running examples have been noted with groups such as St Johns Ambulance Australia and the Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers.

It should also be recognised that Youth Development Programs draw concepts from health promoting school approaches as outlined through the World Health Organisation (see, for example, MindMatters Consortium, 1999: 8-10) and from the literature on resilience (e.g. Benard, 1991, 1996). In particular, concepts of ‘whole school approaches’ here refer explicitly to ‘school organisation, ethos and environment’ and to ‘partnerships and community links’ as well as to ‘classroom teaching and learning’.

State Government Sponsored Youth Development Programs

However, as shall be indicated later in this section, further partnership programs were developed at a state level in Australia in the mid 1990s. These youth development programs, which were the location of this research, are sponsored or supported by State Governments. Local programs operate in partnership between education (primarily schools) and specific community agencies that have their own community-based developmental programs for young people and others (including various forms of ‘cadet’ and induction programs).

Several Australian States and Territories have introduced such youth development programs that are characterised by:

- an alliance between schools and community service agencies;
- active participation by young people in community-level service activities; and
- development of and learning by young people through community-based action.

These programs emphasise goals of developmental outcomes for young people:

- development of specific program knowledge and skills through hands-on instruction, training and experience;
- development of personal and social skills by young people through the provision of increased opportunities and challenges; and
- development of a sense of community service/spirit and responsibility through encouragement of young people to take an active role and to participate in their community.

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1 http://www.nydic.org/devdef.html, 2000
Diversity of and commonality within programs

Within the range of ‘youth development programs’ in Australia, and even within the specific local programs within this research sample, there are many different types of programs. The programs most obviously varied in the nature of the specific activities, skills and abilities offered. They also varied in their balance between goals of individual skill acquisition and the promotion of community service activities. Further, they varied in their motives for the provision of youth-oriented development, between those with a broad and perhaps altruistic sense of community development, and those aimed at the recruitment of future members.

However, the following six points appear to be essential elements of a program if it is to be called a ‘youth development program’ in this area. They:

- are open to all young people;
- aim to achieve specific and positive outcomes or growth for participants: development of skills, knowledge, attitudes etc;
- focus on learning through experience: active, hands-on learning;
- involve young people in active program decision-making and implementation roles;
- support young people’s involvement outside schools in the wider community; and
- have schools and community groups working together to provide the program.

International perspectives

While Australian reports define youth development as:

> providing all young people with positive experiences and opportunities which enhance their strengths and capacities and which affirm them as contributors to their communities now and shapers of their own future (Ausyouth 2002b: 1)

this definition draws upon many decades of international discussion and debate, particularly in the USA.

More recently, through the work of the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research (1991), the National Network for Youth (1996), the Youth Development Institute (1997), the International Youth Development Forum/Youth Foundation (1996-2000), the Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service (2001), the Forum for Youth Investment (2002) and the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development (2002-2004), there have been perspectives emerging that contrast traditional problem-based approaches to young people, with ‘positive youth development’ approaches.

> For the most part, positive youth development outcomes often contain broad statements about how we want young people to be good citizens, good neighbors, good workers, and good parents. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development has pushed further, articulating a general list of competencies that we want for young people (Carnegie Corporation, 1989). These include academic, cognitive, civic, emotional, physical, vocational, and social and cultural competence. Beyond these expected competencies, an important set of secondary outcomes exist – those that allow young people to be not only competent, but also connected, caring and committed (Roth and Brooks-Gunn, 2000). In addition to skills, young people must have a solid sense of safety and structure, membership, and belonging, as well as mastery of a sense of purpose, responsibility and self-worth. (Mohamed and Wheeler, 2001: 7)

Though ‘positive youth development’ approaches emphasise their contrast with ‘deficit-based approaches’, the intrinsic danger remains that any externally defined notion of ‘development’ can imply that young people are somehow ‘lacking’ and need to be ‘developed’. Such approaches have highlighted a community emphasis on and commitment to developing young people in ways that are socially approved.

In response, more recent discussions have focused on ‘broadening the bounds of youth development’ to recognise ‘youth as engaged citizens’ (Mohamed and Wheeler, 2001), as ‘civic
activists’ (Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, 2001) or as ‘creators of community change’ (Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, 2004).

Karen Pittman presented some of these ideas in Australia in defining ‘future directions in youth development’ (Ausyouth, 2002c):

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\text{We have to be serious about engagement, and engagement means participation and ultimately engagement means sharing power; having them not just come to the table and offer opinions but actually come to the table and have a seat at the table for decision-making purposes. (Pittman, 2002)}
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However it has been pointed out that:

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\text{disturbingly, many youth development organizations and programs have failed to take seriously the need for youth participation, voice, input, and power in the decision-making process. Unfortunately, too many youth development programs and organizations have not practiced youth empowerment. In these programs, young people have not been viewed as partners, often creating an organizational culture of ‘adultism’ – all those behaviors and attitudes flowing from assumptions that adults are superior to young people and are entitled to act upon young people without agreement or consent. (Mohamed and Wheeler, 2001: 8)}
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Ausyouth similarly noted the importance of allaying notions of ‘youth development’ with those of ‘youth participation’, particularly in its emphasis on young people as shapers of their own futures, and in recognising that positive youth development and youth participation must be inextricably linked. Such approaches recognise that there cannot be non-deficit youth development without recognition of the active participation of young people in determining that development; and there cannot be effective youth participation without attention to the development of appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes of young people. In this way, youth development is:

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\text{focused on building on the strengths and abilities of young people in ways that strengthen their learning and connection with community in the present, as well as encouraging young people’s participation in actively shaping their futures. It is for all young people, using common processes for diverse groups. Youth development focuses on the community’s investment in the wellbeing and personal development of young people, and that of young people themselves in their own futures. (Ausyouth 2002a: 2)}
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Intrinsic to these debates are ideas about the relationship of young people to their community and society. Are young people to be seen as outside (or even antagonistic to) civil society? Are they to be seen as providing ‘service’ or support to that society? Are they to be seen as citizens, determining and shaping that society?

There are current British debates in similar areas. Currently, proposals for some form of compulsory, ‘expected’ or voluntary civic service for young people are being debated. Issues of a ‘national youth volunteering strategy’ (Williamson, 2004), of a ‘youth community service scheme’ (Fox and Besselink, 2004) and of a ‘national youth action programme’ (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2004) are being discussed (National Youth Agency, 2004). Again, the same issues of skill and civic development occur in the discussions of programs “through which young people can develop their skills and, through the culture of service, become more active citizens”. (Fox and Besselink, 2004: p.1)

Commentaries on the British proposals similarly contrast deficit or punitive approaches with those that empower and encourage young people:

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\text{The Government talks a great deal about engaging young people but rarely manages to actually do so, largely because the language it uses and the policies it pursues are often perceived as being strident and punitive. Young people are seen in an almost entirely negative way through the prism of the ‘rights and responsibilities’ agenda. Policy … is framed in the context of addressing the problems associated with youth rather than any positive contribution young people can and do make to our society. What’s therefore needed is a move away from this reliance on the vocabulary of rights and responsibilities, towards a new language which embraces the value of common undertakings, which reflects reciprocal opportunities rather than just obligations… What’s needed then is a policy approach which seeks to forge genuinely new links between young people and Government. A commitment to a community service framework could provide that new approach. But it will only do so if the framework reflects the language of youth and marks a genuine shift to}
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reciprocity, if it chimes with their aspirations and interests and empowers them in a way never experienced before. (Fox and Besselink, 2004: p.2)

Views about the concepts of power, values, society and the future mark the international debate about youth development. They are anchored in perceptions of how one views young people, how one constructs community, and how one plans development.

Youth development policy in Australia

Many non-government service organisations that provide programs for young people, such as Scouts Australia, Guides Australia, Red Cross or the Royal Life Saving Society, view themselves as having been providers of youth development programs for many years. These organisations, together with the Australian Defence Services Cadets Scheme, see themselves as providing programs for young people that meet community needs, as well as providing for future organisational recruitment.

However, purpose-designed and named youth development programs that are linked to international work on “positive youth development” commenced only recently at a state level, with Western Australia offering the first state-sponsored program in 1996. Victoria followed suit in 1997, with Queensland launching their program in 1998, and South Australia commencing a pilot program in 2000. All of these State-sponsored programs have developed partnerships with a broad range of non-government service organisations that have provided the content or flavour of the program within a framework designed by a state coordinating unit. Detail on each of these state programs is provided in this Report. Official involvement of the Australian Government at a national level was a later occurrence and responded to the international debates, to a desire for national coordination and support, and to service organisations’ requirements for support and growth.

The four State-sponsored youth development programs have continued, despite a change of government in each of the four states. Each program has made some structural and process changes, and some have managed funding decreases.

National involvement

At a national level, interest in youth development programs has grown since the late 1990s. The active involvement of the Australian Government was facilitated by a proposal from Western Australia to the April 1999 MCEETYA meeting, which suggested that the Australian Government take a leadership role on youth development and consider a national rollout of programs. The Council members established a youth sub-group “to develop a national youth development strategy and report to Ministers later in 1999”. (MCEETYA, 2000: p.7)

In working toward a position on youth development for Australia, the First National Youth Development Conference was held in Perth, October 1999, at which Dr David Kemp, the then Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs was a keynote speaker. This provided an opportunity for a range of non-Government youth organisations to speak further about, and to advocate with government for, national support for youth development programs. Dr Kemp confirmed that the Australian Government “would like to work with State and Territory Governments to develop a national scheme that builds on these successes and allows for significant expansion of youth development opportunities” (Kemp, 1999) and announced two major initiatives. The first was accreditation of training for cadets or young people in youth development programs, a project to be auspiced by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), and a national facilitation unit to coordinate and support youth development activities nationally. Ausyouth, a purpose-designed organisation based in Adelaide, won the contract to be this unit and commenced operating in April 2000.

Just prior to Ausyouth’s commencement, MCEETYA considered the background paper developed by the youth sub-group at its March 2000 meeting. It “endorsed the concept of youth development as a positive approach to young people’s needs … and the (National Youth Development) strategy to develop and expand community-based youth development programs” (2000, p.3). The Strategy outlined an agenda that would explore what youth development had to offer to young Australians. It noted that, although demonstrating success, the cadet-style programs established to date by the states -
Western Australia (Cadets WA), Victoria (Victorian Youth Development Program: VYDP), Queensland (Youth Action Program) and South Australia (activ8) - or the Australian Defence Services Cadet Scheme – were not the only style of program available or appropriate to meet young people’s needs. The Strategy indicated there was no clear long-term commitment to further action at an Australian Government level before the proposed activity under the Strategy had occurred and been evaluated. It focused at a broad level on what could be achieved, with attention to accreditation and facilitation specifically, but did not contain an implementation plan.

**Ausyouth**

Ausyouth saw its role as encompassing three main areas:

- Explore youth development concepts through:
  - conceptual analysis of existing research and literature; for example, the key initial focus was “good practice in youth development”’: if it is an important direction in Australia, how does one need to construct and operate youth development programs?
  - direct consultation with people involved in Australian youth development programs: service providers, school staff, young people;
  - an active research program that filled out the gaps in the literature and developed an Australian base of literature;

- Coordinate national forums that draw together key stakeholders (government, business and community organisations, and young people) to explore what youth development means for their organisation and the future of youth development in the 21st century; and

- Work with the state-funded youth development programs to explore common interests, policies, practices and issues, particularly if a future decision was taken to roll out a national program.

Through this work Ausyouth also needed to set up communication networks between all stakeholders, develop a strategic approach to promotion and sponsorship, and help construct a future vision for youth development in Australia. Although initially funded for 12 months, the funding was extended for a further 16 months to mid-2002 so that Ausyouth could more comprehensively address its brief and build on the foundations laid in the first year. The outcomes of Ausyouth’s work, and the many publications developed as resources for the youth development field, are located at: [http://www.thesource.gov.au/ausyouth/](http://www.thesource.gov.au/ausyouth/)

The Ausyouth project evolved through several phases over its life. An initial focus on community-based ‘cadet’ style programs broadened in scope to include more general community-based program initiatives, to better reflect the diversity of interest in a positive youth development approach. It became apparent that it was important to look at youth development more broadly than cadet-style programs, although they still held an important place. Ausyouth was instrumental in promoting positive debate on youth development and promoting awareness of the concept and the benefits that can flow from it.

Government and community agencies regarded much of Ausyouth’s work as very successful. The organisation laid the groundwork for positive discussions around matters such as a common national minimum data set, bringing together individuals and organisations that had previously not spoken to each other. The Good Practice Principles Framework has been particularly well received, with the Australian Defence Force Cadets commissioning a special print run in order to provide a copy to each cadet unit.

It was also evident from the discussion and outcomes of Ausyouth’s final national forums in Sydney and Adelaide, July 2002, that a need remained for national leadership in youth development, but that neither state-sponsored programs nor non-government program providers had the infrastructure or resources to continue the level of communication and facilitation required to effectively share information, explore issues and develop joint strategies, indicators or resources that would continue guiding the youth development field.
State-funded youth development programs

South Australia

The South Australian program, activ8, began in March 2000 as a pilot program with three years of initial funding. It evolved from the April 1999 MCEETYA meeting where there was agreement that, in addition to exploring the concept of a national youth development program, Ministers with responsibility for youth affairs would “support the broadening and development of the concept of cadet style training, to enable nationally based community organisations to establish and promote cadet and youth movements” (Office for Youth [SA], 2003: p.13).

The program was based on a statewide consultation process in late 1999, and designed to align with the National Youth Development Strategy by taking a positive approach to meeting young people’s needs, i.e. a strengths-based rather than deficit-based approach. Eight key values were named as the foundation for activ8: trust, honesty, integrity, respect, fairness, courage, enterprise and excellence. It sought to incorporate the following four principles and aims (Office for Youth [SA], 2003: p.13):

- Young people need to develop tangible links with their communities.
- Youth development programs can strengthen partnerships between schools and program providers of both government and volunteer-based community services.
- Youth development programs provide a significantly increased range of experiences and opportunities for young people, which, in turn, lead to young people increasing their leadership capabilities and self-reliance.
- The program should encourage young people to contribute back to the community.

Activ8 programs were initially structured as time-limited two-year funded programs, usually hosted by a school. The school identified the community program partner(s) with whom it would work in partnership to design and deliver the program, based on a memorandum of agreement. These partners were diverse, ranging from the Australian Red Cross, Conservation Volunteers, Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS), Scouts and Guides Australia (Future Leaders), Country Fire Service (CFS), St Johns, and the various Defence Cadets, to Carclew Youth Arts and the YMCA. There were not sufficient funds to make it available to every secondary school, so schools applied for activ8 funding at once or twice a year funding rounds. Getting a funded program in one year did not guarantee a school being successful in a subsequent round of funding to run a program with a new group of students, although many schools were funded for two or three years in a row.

During the three-year pilot phase, each program catered for up to 40 students. Programs were funded at $450 per student in the first year along with a one-off $50 per student administration payment, followed by $350 per student in the second year. One-year programs were made available for 15-19 year olds at the first year funding rate. The program monies were given to the school to ‘buy in’ the program elements they wanted from a provider. This was usually their involvement in a pre-existing course or curriculum framework that had been designed by the program provider, for example, the RLSS Bronze Star or Bronze Medallion, a Certificate 1 in Firefighting with the CFS, or the Red Cross Community Challenge program. Program providers varied in the amount of flexibility they offered, as well as whether or not they took a hands-on or advisory role in the program. This affected the flexibility with which the school designed the program and the level of influence available to young people from community-based personnel.

Activ8’s later start, compared with other state programs, enabled it to learn from their experiences. This led to some different emphases in establishing the culture of programs. For example, more effort was put into: 1) establishing an activ8 Community Coordination Group and ensuring involvement of the provider organisation; 2) offering more flexibility regarding uniforms or program specific clothing; and 3) encouraging the participation of young people in determining the content and focus of programs at school level. Similarly to other programs, it required the completion of a First Aid Certificate as a mandatory component of the program curriculum.

Most activ8 programs in SA schools were run within school hours, and some schools made it a curriculum or elective offering in a particular year level. Programs offered at Year 10 or above
were increasingly linking *activ8* to the SACE (South Australian Certificate of Education) curriculum as a Community Studies subject so students would gain a SACE point. Other schools negotiated time within the school timetable for *activ8* activities on an *ad hoc* basis. The success of this depended on school culture and the level of support at school management and staff level. There were occasions when activities occurred in non-school hours such as camps, occasional weekend events or an early morning start. In each school, a staff member was responsible for coordinating and/or delivering the *activ8* program. This provided consistency and stability for young people who knew exactly who to contact about *activ8* matters, with easy access to staff across the school week. At times this role was shared, which had the advantage of sharing the workload, as most teachers received minimal or no time allocation for taking on this role.

Following a change of government in 2002, there was some uncertainty about *activ8*’s future beyond the pilot phase, which finished in mid-2003 with the release of a program evaluation report (Office for Youth [SA], 2003). The program was maintained before gaining a further four-year commitment in the 2004 State Budget with a reduced annual funding allocation. As the Labor Government was concerned with a range of social inclusion issues affecting young people, they also wished to invest in other youth-focused programs that reached a broad number of young people. This has led to a 50% reduction to the central coordinating team (five positions were reduced to 2.5) and a 25-30% reduction in annual program monies. Levels of per student funding were also reduced to a flat rate of $400 per year in 2004.2

Other recent changes to *activ8* have resulted from both the budget changes as well as the evaluation outcomes. They include:

- Rather than applying for one two-year program at a time, host organisations (often schools) can apply for up to four years of program funding and run either four one-year or two two-year programs. Each program includes up to 30 young people.
- There is a stipulation that no more than 10% of the budget is used for asset purchases/infrastructure costs in a 12-month period.
- More detail is required from host organisations about the program plan in the application form in order to tighten the initial planning and encourage higher levels of youth participation.
- A two-part moderation of programs is required, i.e. at the 3 and 12 month point in each program, which strengthens the previous arrangement of a single visit mid-way through the first year and then a final visit toward the end of the second year.

There remains strong uptake of *activ8* in 2004, mostly by government schools though non-government schools or other community settings also apply and are successful in gaining funding; demand continues to exceed grant funding. For example, 60 schools (both government and non-government) received funding for an *activ8* program in the 2004/2005 round, along with three Youth Education Centres operating out of youth remand centres. Currently, there are 10 program providers registered with *activ8*. Since *activ8* commenced, a total of 76 schools have been funded to run one or more programs: 36 government metropolitan, 26 government rural and 14 non-government schools.

The evaluation report (Office for Youth [SA], 2003) also noted some areas of interest to this longitudinal research. Local programs were encouraged to demonstrate more clearly the degree to which there is youth participation and decision-making in the program, with this area to be actively considered during program moderations by the central coordinating unit. The evaluation identified that such participation was lacking in some programs. Programs were also encouraged to have young people undertake a self-rating at the beginning and end of programs to provide a benchmark for both personal achievement and program effectiveness; this could be extended to self-ratings during the program. To that point, *activ8* had not provided self-rating tools, although they had developed and promoted a number of resources that young people could use to develop portfolios, or to support school and program staff to map the program content to secondary school

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2 However, if the Defence Cadets are the service providers, then the funding is $200 per participant to acknowledge the Australian Government funding that the Defence Forces are given for their cadet programs.
curriculum so that young people’s work could be recognised (Australian National Training Authority, 2004).

There was concern that programs find ways of explicitly recognising the contributions to the community that program participants’ make through activ8. In addition, the evaluation recommended that community activity be mandated rather than voluntary. The report also recommended a review to address the financial requirements for administering and staffing local programs by community program providers, as this restricts some from increasing their involvement or development of their youth development work.

**Victoria**

The Victorian Youth Development Program (VYDP) was a community service-based project introduced to Victorian government secondary colleges by the Victorian Government in 1997. Its purpose was to enable schools and community organisations to work together with young people outside of the classroom in offering young people a range of opportunities that promoted youth leadership and community service. The program was voluntary for both schools and young people.

Under the VYDP, schools entered a partnership with one of several leading community organisations, including:

- Air Training Corps – Royal Australian Air Force;
- Army Cadet Corps – Royal Australian Army;
- CFA Youth Crew – Country Fire Authority;
- Coast Guard Cadets – Australian Volunteer Coast Guard;
- Community Leaders – Australian Red Cross;
- Environment Corps – Parks Victoria;
- Future Leaders – Scouts Australia and Guides Victoria;
- Life Saving Victoria – Surf Life Saving Victoria (SLSV) and Royal Life Saving Society Australia (RLSSA);
- Naval Reserve Cadets – Royal Australian Navy;
- SES Cadets – State Emergency Service;
- St John Ambulance Cadets – St John Ambulance;
- Victoria Police Youth Corps – Victoria Police.

The VYDP operated in two parts. In Part A, each college chose one service provider and was offered to students over a minimum period of two years. In Part B, all students completed the following core components:

- Accredited First Aid Course;
- Accredited Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation Training; and
- The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award (bronze level) covering four key sections of ‘service’, ‘skill’, ‘expedition’ and ‘physical recreation’.

Under the VYDP, Colleges had the flexibility to decide whether the program was conducted in or outside school hours and in or outside the formal curriculum program. Secondary colleges received State Government funding of $450 for each student in the college’s first year in the VYDP, and $400 for each student in subsequent years.

The VYDP commenced in 1997 with 835 secondary students from 28 government schools participating. This number grew to over 8500 students from 178 schools in 2001.

A new program model – the **Advance Program** – was introduced in 2004 to replace the VYDP and to “… build on the successful components of the Victorian Youth Development Program.” One of the objectives of the change is to extend “its benefits to schools across Victoria.” (Victorian Office for
Youth, 2004) The program continues to be administered through the Victorian Office for Youth, though this Office has now moved from its location with the Victorian Department of Education and Training to the Department for Victorian Communities.

All Victorian Government secondary school campuses are eligible to apply to deliver Advance. It is a youth development program that provides opportunities for young people to work in partnership with community organisations on a project or in contributing to building their community. Through Advance, young people choose volunteer opportunities with community organisations that support and recognise young people’s positive contributions. Young people work in teams and are provided with a challenging program that develops communication and project management skills. Through involvement in the program, schools, young people and community organisations develop networks of relationships whilst achieving shared goals.

The essential elements are that young people do something with their community, that they do it in partnership with a community organisation and that it involves young people’s choice.

Participating schools deliver five program components:

- community investigation;
- community participation skills development;
- recognised training;
- a project delivered with a community partner; and
- reflection and celebration.

Under the Advance Program:

- The Office for Youth supports participating schools by providing funding, guidelines, curriculum materials and support to plan, implement and evaluate the program. Schools are funded up to $9,725 for a minimum of 21 students. This is based on an allocation of $245 per student and $800 for teacher professional development.

- Advance programs within schools are funded annually and young people are able to participate in the program for up to two years. Advance uses a flexible program model and it can be delivered in a range of ways where schools are responsible for implementing the program.

- Community organisations will contribute according to their capacity, primarily providing support to develop a community project. Community organisations will contribute their knowledge and skills to the school community. The flexibility of Advance enables community organisations to be involved as partners in one, several or all components of the program and may work with schools in a variety of ways. Schools and community organisations plan and document the project or activities and the roles and responsibilities of all involved in the partnership in a School Community Partnership Agreement.

- The Office for Youth, schools and community organisations will work together to promote the principles of youth development.

The key differences for existing VYDP schools are:

- the program is funded on an annual basis;
- the school can choose different or even a number of service providers;
- the Duke of Edinburgh Award (Bronze) is only one option for the ‘Recognised Training’ component;
- the community involvement is based on project work rather than on-going participation and involvement; and
- the curriculum covering core units of ‘community investigation’ and ‘community participation skills development’ provided by the Office for Youth will have to be incorporated in the program.
Western Australia

In 1996 the Western Australian Government introduced Cadets WA as part of its overall commitment to young people in the state. It began with 500 students participating in 11 pilot schools. Since that time there has been marked growth in the number of units and participating young people. In 2004, more than 6000 young people were enrolled in 176 units across the state.

The programs were introduced against a backdrop of a “...significant level of community concern about the activities and direction of many young people and their behaviour towards each other and older members of society” (Training and Assessment Services, 1999: p.8). The proposed cadet programs were seen to be one way of addressing perceived anti-social activities, a lack of direction and the loss of established values.

While the initial programs were based on the long established traditional cadet model, training methods and procedures within the Program have evolved and now reflect changed community values and expectations. Programs focus on practical life skills, leadership, teamwork and the development of initiative as well as fostering community responsibility and service. Young people may now choose from one of the following programs:

- Australian Air Force Cadets;
- Australian Army Cadets;
- Australian Navy Cadets;
- CALM Bush Rangers;
- Emergency Service Cadets;
- Life Saving Cadets;
- Police Rangers;
- Red Cross Cadets;
- St Johns Ambulance Cadets.

The objectives of Cadets WA are to:

- Encourage and support the establishment, development and expansion of community based cadet-style training into the state’s secondary schools;
- Encourage young people to become members of voluntary, school-based cadet organisations established or supported by the program;
- Encourage development of the individual through training in leadership, teamwork, initiative, and develop qualities of self-discipline, community service and responsibility;
- Enhance, promote and project a positive image of the State’s youth;
- Encourage and foster the ideal of community service by establishing and strengthening links between the individual, their host organisation, their school and their community, through active participation in the programs;
- Complement existing formal education, training programs and courses by encouraging the accreditation and recognition of skills and competencies gained by individuals during the course of their cadet training.

Participation in programs is voluntary and open to all students and young people of secondary school age. In order to ensure that barriers to participation are minimised, units are financed at the rate of $450, $350 and $250 per first, second and third year student respectively. This funding provides for the purchase of uniforms, costs associated with camps and outdoor activities, and additional expenses associated with the operation of the programs. Without this government financial support it is clear than many young people would be excluded from the programs. The number of units, however, is currently capped by available government funding. Notwithstanding this restriction, there continues to be strong student demand for participation in the cadet programs in WA and in the case of some providers, there is a waiting list of schools seeking to establish a cadet unit.
In 2003, Cadets WA directed that all programs should operate out of school hours and also include students from multiple year levels. Some staff were concerned that a requirement for programs to move to after school provision would preclude those rural young people who traveled long distances to school on the school bus. Cadets WA gave assurances, however, that allowance would be made where young people were manifestly disadvantaged by such a requirement.

The value and achievements of the programs are widely recognised by the stakeholders. Consideration, for example, has been given to the formal recognition of the programs. An earlier review maintained that this could reinforce the link between Cadets WA and possible future careers (Market Equity Pty Ltd, 2001). Most recently, the activities are currently being considered by the Curriculum Council for recognition and accreditation as part of the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE). The outcomes and requirements of some of the cadet activities are not unlike similar programs currently included in the WACE. This is awarded at the end of Year 12 and provides those students not seeking tertiary entrance with appropriate certification. A significant number of students currently fail to go beyond the compulsory years and recognition could serve to encourage many to complete the post-compulsory years 11 and 12.

Several issues are yet to be resolved. There are likely to be significant resource implications. Staff training, for example, would be required in organisations where there are numbers of volunteer staff. Formalisation of requirements could also impact negatively on the learning processes that young people value and that distinguish cadets from the normal school program. Nonetheless, there is strong support from unit leaders for formal recognition, particularly as a means of retaining older students in cadets were they able to include some of their program as part of their school certification. Even more significant is the potential that cadets has in increasing the retention rate of students in the post-compulsory years and in meeting the needs of young people who do stay on but who are disaffected by current school programs.

**Key ideas:**

- ‘Youth development’ is happening all the time, as young people grow and learn. It also occurs in all sorts of places and times – individually, in homes, in schools, in community groups.
- ‘Youth development’ is defined in Australia as: “A process which prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically and cognitively competent. Positive youth development addresses the broader developmental needs of youth, in contrast to deficit-based models, which focus solely on youth problems.” (MCEETYA, 2000)
- The youth development programs on which this research is based are sponsored or supported by State Governments in Australia, occur in or in association with schools, and involve community-based program providers. While there are similarities between State Programs, there are also significant differences in their structures, requirements, emphases and approaches.
- The community-based program providers also differ substantially in the type of organisation, activities offered and degree of active involvement in these programs. Consequently, there are many different types of programs, but all are open to all young people, aim to achieve specific and positive outcomes or growth for participants (development of skills, knowledge, attitudes etc), focus on learning through experience (active, hands-on learning), involve young people in active program decision-making and implementation roles, support young people’s involvement outside schools in the wider community, and have schools and community groups working together to provide the program.
This Study

This section of the Report introduces this study and its intentions, summarises the methodology used, and comments on associated issues. More details of the research stages and questions are contained in the Technical Report of the study.

Intentions of the study

The Longitudinal Study of Participants in Youth Development Programs was established to follow a group of young people on their journeys in state-sponsored youth development programs throughout 2002-2004, with a view to “capture anecdotal evidence about changes [in behaviour, attitudes and characteristics] in a small group of young people participating in youth development activities” (Request for Tender). It was initially suggested that information would be obtained through interviews with 60 young people over three years and that these would focus on benefits, skills, behaviour, and attitudes to youth development, reasons for program participation, and program pluses and criticisms.

Ausyouth had already identified significant growth in the number of and enrolment in these programs since 1996 (Ausyouth, 2000); in fact, in some areas, the support available for participation by schools had not been able to match the demand. Yet little was known about why either institutions (schools, providers etc) or young people themselves become involved, or about what the outcomes of participation were.

The Request for Tender suggested that: “One of the major potential benefits of youth development projects is the positive changes in young people’s behaviour, attitudes and characteristics over a period of time” but also noted that “it is extremely difficult to measure these changes.” This is particularly true in a context where young people participate in a range of initiatives of which a ‘youth development program’ is one, and where the nature of the experience may vary substantially from site to site. The study is not looking at possible outcomes from a single, specific program, but from a diverse set of related program approaches.

Methodology

The study was initially conducted on four sites in each of three states (South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia). These sites were chosen on the advice of local program providers and coordinators in order to establish a broad sample addressing type of program provider and geographical location.

The 12 youth development programs within schools across the three states started in the study at the end of 2001. An initial sample of five young people at each site was selected at random from program participants to form the core student sample. This sample was supplemented by the selection of small groups of other program participants to provide broader perspectives on the issues emerging from interviews. Research approvals and permissions were obtained at system, school and family/individual levels.

Before programs commenced in 2002, background information was collected from teachers at the schools, and small group interviews were conducted with 131 young people who might join these programs. These interviews addressed projected program operations, and student views on program information and selection and on their hopes and expectations for program outcomes.

Individual interviews with the core students and group interviews with other participants were carried out three times in 2002 and twice in 2003. School-based program coordinators (teachers) and program providers were also interviewed about their views of the young people involved and about program characteristics.
When members of the core sample left their program and/or school, they were replaced as soon as possible in the sample by other young people from the same cohort – in many cases from the young people who had been involved in the group interviews.

At the end of 2002, the sample size was increased to 18 schools and 90 students by identifying and including five students from each of two further schools in each state. This enabled the research to ensure that a range of good practices was well represented in the research sample, and that the views of a diversity of young people, program providers and contexts were represented within the research.

As the research developed, five critical themes emerged to define questions that framed the research interests: Quality program outcomes, Quality learning approaches, Decision-making and youth participation, Inclusiveness and Relationships (including program partnerships and support, and community linkages).

In 2004, tentative research outcomes in these areas were written up in a set of discussion papers and these formed the basis for discussions with young people, teachers and program providers in the sample schools. Follow-up interviews were also conducted with many of the original core sample of young people around their post-program use of youth development program outcomes.

In order to contextualise, compare and make sense of information from the core group of young people about outcomes, this study also collected large amounts of information about young people’s perspectives on elements of program operations, and also views on these issues from many teachers and program providers. The extent of information gathered far exceeded the original expectations at the start of this research.

The individual and group interviews used a mix of structured and semi-structured instruments. There were consistent elements in all interviews, and other elements that evolved and became more probing as the research progressed. Throughout the study, the research asked the core sample of young people to provide a personal rating of ‘changes’ in nine areas suggested by program literature as possible program outcomes.

In 2003, using responses provided by young people, participants were asked to respond to statements in order to indicate the extent of occurrence and the importance they attached to various program outcomes and approaches.

In this Report, where participants responded to these questions and quantitative information is drawn upon, comparative percentages are noted; where information is drawn from interviews or from unprompted student responses, more generalised statements (such as ‘many’ or ‘a few’) are made about the extent of such responses.

Further details of research methodology, including Research Stages and Research Questions may be found in the Technical Report of this study.

Comments on and limitations in methodology and data

There was wide variation in both program type and program objectives across the 18 programs. The research has therefore not been looking at a single, consistent program and assessing its outcomes. While the research is able to provide a scoping study of student perceptions and outcomes from a variety of programs, there are strong limitations on the ways that results can be generalised or compared.

Perceptions

The information in this study is intentionally that of the perceptions of young people and others around personal outcomes, program factors and levels of participation rather than ‘objective’ information. Such perceptions provide a direct ‘voice’ for young people about important aspects of these programs, but may be directly influenced by many other factors. It is acknowledged that there may be other underlying elements consistently influencing perceptions. For example in looking at outcomes and participation, a factor such as ‘optimism’ might mean that one student consistently rates both outcomes and level of participation highly, while another rates these lower; this might then lead to implications of a link between the two, whereas both were more strongly linked to a third un-stated area.
Secondly, when respondents are asked about perceptions of changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes etc, such changes may also be directly affected by their perceptions of their starting points: those saying 'little change' may merely be saying 'we already could do that well'.

Throughout the report, responses are reported as ‘fact’; however the reader should constantly remember that these ‘facts’ are the views of respondents.

**Sampling and population groups**

The research has sampled a small group of young people in each of several diverse schools and programs. This enabled the research to scope outcomes across several programs and to look at consistencies as well as differences in outcomes.

The diversity between sites was substantial and there are concerns about the broader conclusions that can be drawn from this information. The relatively small sample numbers further limit analysis and conclusions about various population sub-groups.

While attempts were made to include young people from a range of geographical and cultural backgrounds, young people from both Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds remained particularly under-represented in the sample. As the overall sample size declined (as young people left programs), the numbers here became even smaller. To look at outcomes for these groups, it is suggested that specific research in these areas needs to be developed.

**Longitudinal versus cross-sectional study**

Young people in the initial sample left programs throughout the research. While the study retains some longitudinal aspects (both in terms of continued interviews with the original sample, and because of the continued collection of data across an extended time period), it also forms a ‘cross-sectional study’ of these programs. The operation of and outcomes from a cross-section of youth development programs in three states were examined through the identification and examination of a cross-section of perspectives principally of student participants on several major issues identified through this research.

**Outcomes over time**

Many respondents indicated the conclusions about the application of outcomes and on-going gains in knowledge, skills and behaviour would need a longer research time-frame before these could be considered to be ‘lasting’.

**School and program resistance**

While the research in general maintained a positive and productive sample of schools and young people, there was some early resistance and concern from schools about the frequency of visits and about the repetition of data collection. There was a danger that young people, in particular, would become cynical and bored with being asked what seemed to be repetitive questions about program progress (particularly when they saw little change happening within programs).

Associated with this, the researchers were asked by schools to present tentative research feedback in ways that would be useful to them. These concerns contributed to changes in the research methodology, particularly a decrease in the number of planned visits and the collection of responsive information around the Discussion Papers.

**Variation in instruments**

Methodological variations meant that several parallel data collection instruments were at times used for different groups who were at different stages of the research. Common instruments could again be used at the end of 2003 and the research could more easily link information from the core sample of young people, group interviews with participants, teachers, and providers.
The Longitudinal Study of Participants in Youth Development Programs was initiated to follow a group of young people on their journeys in state-sponsored youth development programs throughout 2002-2004, with a view to “capture anecdotal evidence about changes [in behaviour, attitudes and characteristics] in a small group of young people participating in youth development activities.”

The study was commissioned by the Youth Bureau in the Australian Government’s Department of Family and Community Services and conducted by the Australian Youth Research Centre at The University of Melbourne.

The study operated across three states (South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia) from late 2001 to the end of 2004. Initially four local program sites were identified in each state. This was expanded to six sites per state for the second year of the study, thus involving a total of 18 youth development programs. At each site the study has involved regular interviews with at least five young people as the core individual sample, together with further young people interviewed as a group, and interviews with teachers and community-based program providers where appropriate. Where young people in the core sample left the program or the school, they were replaced to maintain the sample size.

Program sites were chosen on the advice of the State Youth Development Program Coordinators in order to provide a broad sampling on the basis of geographical location and program type.

This study involved interviews with program participants on seven occasions over three years.

Key ideas:

- **The Longitudinal Study of Participants in Youth Development Programs** was initiated to follow a group of young people on their journeys in state-sponsored youth development programs throughout 2002-2004, with a view to “capture anecdotal evidence about changes [in behaviour, attitudes and characteristics] in a small group of young people participating in youth development activities.”

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- Program sites were chosen on the advice of the State Youth Development Program Coordinators in order to provide a broad sampling on the basis of geographical location and program type.

- This study involved interviews with program participants on seven occasions over three years.
The Sample

The sample of schools, programs and participants is outlined in this section of the Report. Overall numbers of respondents are described and general information presented on how and why the sample changed during the study – why young people stayed in or left their programs.

The schools

The sample of schools was drawn from program information provided by each State Program to include a range of program types, and to ensure that the programs covered most or all program categories as described by Ausyouth (2000). The sample was adjusted to ensure a locational balance. Schools were mainly Government schools (14 of the 18), and evenly distributed between metropolitan and regional/rural locations.

With one exception, the sample of schools was maintained throughout the three years. At the start of the final year of the research, many of the schools had completed their two-year programs. In addition, one provider indicated that it would not continue to be involved with the Program, and one school was lost entirely from the sample, where the provider was not continuing and the inter-school, after-school Cadets Unit ceased operation. In Victoria, State Program changes at this time also changed the nature of the youth development program.

A summary of the information about the schools and further supportive detail is contained in Appendix 1 of the Technical Report.

The programs

The programs that operated within the sample schools were within the nine provider categories suggested by Ausyouth (Ausyouth, 2000). They involved the Royal and Surf Life Saving Societies, the Future Leaders program of the Scouts and Guides, Army and Naval Cadets, environmental groups such as Parks Victoria and CALM Bush Rangers, Red Cross Cadets, Police, Emergency Services, Country Fire Authorities and a statewide Arts Program.

The program provider was not the only element of diversity within the sample for, even within programs operating within the same state and with the same provider, there was considerable variation on several dimensions:

- **Single year level versus cross-year level**: Half the programs were cross-age programs, with the others distributed between Years 8 to 10. Cadets WA directed that all programs should be cross-year level. This variation has implications both for objectives and also for how the program can be operated within or outside schools.

- **In school versus after school**: Two-thirds of the programs were conducted within school hours. This influences the relationship between the school and the provider and has particular implications for the operation of and student access to programs within rural areas, as well as for issues of credentialing.

- **Teacher-run, provider-run or partnership**: Youth development principles stress the role of a partnership between schools and providers in the provision of programs. In this sample, several very different models operated, from programs totally offered by providers with little or no school involvement (2), through programs with shared control (4) and those with the provider as a lesser player (8), to school courses that had only nominal provider input (4).

- **Part of the curriculum or extra-curricular activities**: Another implication of the relationship between schools and providers and of the way in which the program was regarded by the school, was the relationship of the programs to other areas of the school’s timetable, and
whether the program was recognised/credentialed as part of student learning. Two thirds of these programs were regarded as extra-curricular.

- **Program duration:** The duration of the program depends on its relation to the school and its curriculum. Half the programs in this sample were on-going within schools, with the others mainly of two years’ duration (though some operated for 12 or 18 months).

This indicates the complexity and diversity of programs represented, as schools, providers and communities adapted ‘youth development’ ideas to their local circumstances. The diversity of structures, control and content is reflected in different program intentions; this has profound implications for the range of outcomes for young people e.g. in areas such as orientation towards skill development and/or community service, and around issues of inquiry/obedience.

**The participants**

**Core sample of young people**

Young people in the core sample were interviewed on three occasions in 2002 and on two occasions in 2003. The initial core sample was of 62 young people, and this was supplemented by replacements as participants left programs, and by young people from new schools joining the research in 2003. A total of 145 young people were involved in individual interviews. In 2004, 30 of these young people (including 21 from the original sample) were re-interviewed either in groups or as individuals.

When young people exited their programs (and schools in some cases) during 2002 and 2003, and where researchers had advance information about this, they were replaced in the core sample. On other occasions, this was discovered only on arriving at the school and no replacements were possible. Some of the replacements in the ‘core’ sample subsequently also left the research. Only one school from the original sample had all its five core young people still in the program at the end of 2003, and of the six new schools at the start of 2003, only one maintained its core sample of five young people throughout the year.

With young people moving in and out of the research sample at various times, it is perhaps difficult to gain a view on how young people’s responses changed over time. Therefore some comments are also included throughout this report about the continuing and consistent group of 14 young people who started in the research and who were still present at the end of 2003. It may be that positive changes experienced by these young people within their programs meant that they were encouraged to stay in the program for the two years and that their views became less representative of those of the broader program population.

The core student sample can be analysed by gender, location, jurisdiction and ethnicity. The core sample group remained relatively consistent by gender and by location. Approximately 55-60% of the core sample on each interview occasion was male, and approximately 45% was drawn from metropolitan areas (with 15-20% from regional centres and 35-40% from rural areas). Each interview sample was fairly evenly distributed across the three states. At the start of the research, less than 2% of the sample identified as Indigenous, and less than 10% as being from non-English speaking backgrounds. Both these percentages declined substantially during the research with no Indigenous young people and only one non-English speaking background young person in the final core group.

At the start of the research, most young people were in Year 8 (40%), Year 9 (16%) or Year 10 (36%). The core sample included young people who were (at the start of their first year in the study) from 11 to 17 years old.

**Young people in group interviews**

The research also carried out group interviews with other student participants in each school at each visit. Between 69 and 113 young people were involved in these groups. The composition of these groups of participants was similar to that of the core sample on the basis of gender, location, and ethnicity.
Other participants

On most visits to the programs, school and provider staff were also interviewed. Up to 17 teachers and 10 program providers were interviewed.

Overall research participant numbers

The research can firstly be seen as a longitudinal study. Chart 1 shows the changes in the size of the core student sample between 2002 and 2004, with the black bars showing the ‘depletion’ of the original group. The grey bars indicate total numbers in each round of interview including replacement and new participants.

Chart 1: Longitudinal View of Core Student Sample 2002-2004

Secondly, the study presents a cross-sectional view of the programs and Chart 2 shows the total number of participants (core – continuing and added), group members, teachers and providers who were interviewed at each stage of the research.

Chart 2: Cross-Sectional View of Total Sample 2001-2004
Young people staying or exiting

Because some young people were leaving the programs (and this included those who were leaving the school), it was important to understand reasons both for staying in programs or for exiting. Continuing students were asked about this in 2003, and some exiting students were also interviewed. The following were unprompted responses, with the young people frequently mentioning several responses.

Continuing students said:

The overwhelming reason for continuing in programs was positive - a continued interest in what they were doing in the programs. Approximately a quarter of the young people mentioned reasons associated with being with friends (and this proportion increased during the year), while smaller numbers said they had made a two-year commitment and were required to honour that (11%) or that program completion was required for a credential or a job (13%). At the start of the year some young people (13%) said they had nothing better to do (or no better choice to make), though this proportion had declined substantially by the end of the year (6%). A small number (2-3%) said they continued because the program was free; almost no young people continued because they were forced to do so.

Exiting students said:

The exit information provided was drawn from young people who made a decision to leave the programs (rather than those who simply finished the course). They said they left because they were dissatisfied with the course (in various ways), had priorities for or clashes with other subjects, and experienced in-school and out-of-school pressures from other subjects/activities. Some typical comments were

Boredom/Lack of relevance:

“It was starting to get boring. Was OK to start with but I found the marching boring. And the classroom stuff.”

Curriculum reasons - including subject clashes:

“I wanted to do the agriculture option and that was offered at the same time as cadets so I had to make a choice. I would have definitely kept going if it was not on at the same time.”

“Needed to make other subject choices - want to go on to university and have to do other subjects that help me do that.”

Some of these young people subsequently joined another program:

“Joined the Blue Boys program - an agricultural course conducted on a farm - learn all farm skills - welding, animal husbandry, etc.”

Difficulties with out-of-school commitments:

“Doing rowing every night and also football.”

Difficulties with in-school work pressures:

“It was interfering with all my important subjects, like maths, science and English. Activ8 was good for me but they were more important because I want to be a doctor. Now I don’t get behind; I keep up with everything. It’s a good course but it interferes. I’ve made heaps more friends from doing food preparation instead and I don’t miss other lessons like with Activ8.”
Key ideas:

- 145 young people from 18 programs in three states were involved in individual interviews during the study. The initial core sample of 62 young people (which increased to 90 young people in the second year) decreased steadily as young people exited from programs or left schools, or as programs concluded; 14 of these young people were still in the sample at the end of the second year of interviews and 21 were reinterviewed (in a follow-up study) in the final year.

- A cross-sectional study of these programs was also provided by group interviews of young program participants (between 69 and 131 in each round), and interviews with teachers (17) and program providers (10). In each of the seven rounds of interviews, up to 200 people took part.

- Continuing participants indicated that they remained interested in program activities, while those who left programs did so because of program dissatisfaction and clashing priorities with other subjects, with out-of-school commitments and with academic requirements.
Student Outcomes

This section of the Report examines program outcomes for young people. It begins with a comparative overview of changes in nine pre-identified outcomes, which are grouped into three clusters of knowledge and skills outcomes, personal and social outcomes, and community connection outcomes. Each of the outcomes is discussed in more detail. It then compares young people’s views on the importance and occurrence of eight statements about possible outcomes. Finally teacher and provider perspectives and evidence on these outcomes are summarised.

Intentions of youth development programs

School communities offer and support youth development programs because of the outcomes they can deliver for young people. These programs have multiple intentions and desired outcomes, including the development of generic and specific knowledge and skills for young people, the encouragement of positive personal attitudes and behaviours, the promotion of inclusion of a variety of young people and the fostering of young people’s connections with and contributions to their communities. In addition, some programs intend to develop the active participation of young people.

The Ausyouth Occasional Paper in 2001 grouped these outcomes under three themes:

- **personal (individual) development**, including teamwork and leadership skills;
- **skill development** through activities that are structured and sequential in their learning outcomes;
- **strengthened connection with community** through relationships, participation and contribution to community. (Ausyouth 2001b: p. 8)

These three themes continue to provide a structure for the examination and comparison of program outcomes for young people in this section of the Report.

In this study, the list of specific indicators of potential outcomes implied by that structure was created by looking at the objectives of various youth development programs and at other writing in the area. Possible outcomes that could be influenced by involvement in programs were identified in nine specific areas (see below).

The phrase ‘quality outcomes’ is frequently used in the literature. This firstly indicates an interest in the quality and depth of important outcomes beyond their simple occurrence, and secondly, in outcomes that describe qualities that are important within participants’ on-going lives. These changes and achievements can have an ongoing impact on the education, employment and relationship experiences of young people in the future. While this section looks at immediate assessment of outcomes, the next section looks at the impact of these outcomes on the lives of young participants beyond the programs.

Overview: comparison of outcomes

The nature of the outcomes for young people was central to the initial design of this research. In the first interviews with young people, prior to their commencement of the programs, they were asked about the changes they **expected** to occur. Later, they were asked about the changes they **experienced** in themselves as a result of being involved in the program.

At first, young people were asked an open question about the outcomes they hoped for and (later) gained through the program; there was a broad prompt to consider areas of ‘knowledge’, ‘skills’ and ‘attitudes’. Building on their responses, young people were then asked to indicate the extent of changes they expected or observed in nine specified outcome areas:
Student Outcomes

- Skill development: *Overall knowledge* and *Overall skills*;
- Personal development: *Overall attitudes and behaviours*; *Teamwork*; *Leadership*; *Individual responsibility*; *Self-discipline*; *Confidence*; and
- Strengthened connection with community: *Community service*.

On a ‘Changes’ sheet, the core sample of young people indicated in each interview whether they had experienced ‘a big improvement’, ‘some improvement’, ‘no change’, or ‘negative change’ (or they could respond ‘don’t know’) in each of these areas.

Later they were asked how they knew these changes and outcomes had been achieved and what they saw as causing them i.e. whether the youth development program was critical or whether there were other factors involved. They were asked: “If I were watching you as you went about your day, what would I see you doing that might show these changes?” This enabled the young people to cite ‘evidence’ of these changes.

The section of the interviews focusing on outcomes was further extended with eight specific possible program outcomes (which were based on young people’s previous responses about what could or did happen because of their participation in the youth development program) provided for their response:

- improving my skills;
- helping me get a job;
- joining community groups;
- learning the theory of the subject;
- getting a certificate;
- learning to obey orders;
- working positively with other people; and
- understanding each other better as people.

They indicated how often these outcomes **occurred** in their program, commented on *why* this happened in their program, and then rated how important they believed these outcomes were and *why*. Perceptions of the occurrence and importance of each item were compared with others, and views gathered on the consistency between what actually happened and what was important.

The information collected in this study enabled a comparison between the program outcomes reported by young people in the nine outcome areas initially identified by the researchers, as well as in the outcome descriptors identified by the young people.

**What was learnt about outcomes?**

For some young people, these interviews were the first time some of these areas had been raised with them as potential or desirable outcomes from their program. They were sometimes surprised that items were included as potential outcomes, and also sometimes found it difficult to reflect on their own outcomes.

Student responses in the form of the more quantitative information are firstly examined here. Further details may be found in tables in the Technical Report.

**Changes in the researcher pre-identified areas**

Young people reported positive outcomes from program participation in *all* the outcome areas tracked, but some outcomes were more strongly identified than others. The greatest positive changes were in the areas of (in order) their ‘skills’, ‘confidence’, ‘teamwork’, and ‘knowledge’. These were also the areas where the young people predicted they would experience the most change. The areas where young people consistently experienced least change were ‘community service’ and ‘self-discipline’.

The following chart shows a comparison between changes reported in each of these nine areas:
The relationship between these nine outcome items remained fairly consistent across school programs and population groups (by gender, location, ethnicity and jurisdiction), and over time. The pattern also was similar for the continuing group of 14 young people who started in the research and were still present at the end of 2003, though outcomes of improved ‘teamwork’ were greater for this group, and improved ‘knowledge’ outcomes smaller.

While the patterns of comparisons between outcomes remained consistent, there were some variations within these results. Overall, young people started each year with higher anticipations of changes in almost all areas than they finished up feeling had been ‘delivered’; the reported changes in outcomes also declined at mid-year before increasing again at the end of each year. For example, Chart 4 shows the changes reported in overall skills throughout the research:

Chart 4: Comparison of change in overall skills: core students 2001-2003

Outcomes were also analysed by the level of young people’s participation in program decision-making (see the section of this report on Participation for further discussion of this). Student

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The change score provides a comparison between areas, where 2 = ‘big improvement’, 1 = ‘some improvement’ and 0 = ‘no change’.

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Student Outcomes

Youth Development Longitudinal Study: Doing Positive Things
perceptions of their learning outcomes were consistently linked with their perceptions of their program participation. Those young people who indicated high or shared participation also rated their changes across the course of the program as greater in all outcome areas: overall knowledge, skills and attitudes, as well as teamwork, leadership, individual responsibility, self-discipline, confidence and community service.

Changes in areas identified by young people

In 2003, young people indicated the importance and occurrence of various program outcomes that they had identified. An average ‘score’ for each response enabled comparison between them and also between their importance and frequency of occurrence. Chart 5 shows the comparisons for these eight items:

![Chart 5: Importance and Occurrence of Outcomes: 2003](image)

“Improving my skills” was consistently identified both as important and as occurring in programs, as were relationship-related outcomes of “working positively with other people” and “understanding each other better”. “Joining community groups” and “getting a certificate” were rated lowest.

For almost all items, outcomes were seen at the end of the year as more important than they were at the beginning. Almost all items were also seen to be more important than their occurrence in programs indicated, with the greatest discrepancies on (in order) “joining community groups” and “learning to obey orders”. Students said that, in these areas, programs should pay more attention to ensuring outcomes. The only exceptions were in the areas of “improving my skills” and “getting a certificate” where students said that the occurrence of program outcomes matched their importance.

“Working positively with other people” emerged consistently through the research, as young people commented about how they developed different relationships with other young people and with teacher and program provider personnel in youth development programs. They saw that the hands-on, practical nature of many of the activities, in which they operate outside of the regular school environment, contributed to this.

There was little difference in the ranking of these issues based on gender, with both males and females providing similar scores for the importance of these outcomes and the degree to which they occurred. The differences by location were similarly very small. However, ‘regional’ young people believed “learning the theory of the subject” was more important than did both ‘metropolitan’ and ‘rural’ young people. Differences by jurisdiction were also minor. The

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4 The score provides a comparison in which 4 = ‘Very important’ and ‘A lot’, 3 = ‘Important’ / ‘Some’, 2 = ‘A little’ and 1 = ‘Not at all’
comments of the young people indicated that, while such jurisdictional differences may reflect some differences in the focus of the youth development programs in each state (perhaps also due to the length of time the programs have been operating), they also were strongly influenced by the specific characteristics of the programs targeted for inclusion in the research in each state.

Analysis of each of these items by perceived level of participation indicated that young people who had lesser participation in program decision-making also reported greater differences between the importance and occurrence of program elements, than did young people who reported higher participation.

Specific outcome areas

The specific outcomes areas (grouped into the three broad themes) will now be examined in more detail in the light of comments provided by young people during interviews.

a) Development of subject-based and generic knowledge and skills

- skill development through activities that are structured and sequential in their learning outcomes. (Ausyouth, 2001b: p. 8)

At the start of each year, young people expected that there would be substantial changes in their knowledge in program-related areas due to their participation. At the end of each of the years, while their perception was that outcomes in this area were consistently achieved and that there had been at least ‘some improvement’ in knowledge, outcomes here were less than they had anticipated. Comments, particularly from the small continuing group, suggest that the young people consider that they had achieved all their ‘knowledge goals’ earlier and that programs had become repetitive in this regard.

By the end of research, young people saw improvement in their ‘overall skills’ as their largest overall outcome. They also saw it as being greater than they had predicted before the programs started. It was the only outcome area that exhibited such an overall increase. This was consistent with the desire of the young people and of the program’s design for skills-focused, hands-on activities and experiences.

Many young people identified specific skills related to program content such as “I used my camping skills on a camp” and “I was at a party on the holidays and I cut my leg and I used my first aid to stop it bleeding.” Others talked about these skills in a more general way: “The skills you learn in cadets you don’t learn in school. They are pretty practical skills. I have used a lot of them now and will always be able to use them.”

Young people in ‘regional’ settings reported stronger improvement in ‘overall skills’ than those reported by both ‘metropolitan’ and ‘rural’ young people. Although females and males both recorded high outcomes in ‘overall skills’, females maintained or increased their change scores across the year while males reported that the degree of change decreased from beginning to end of the year.

‘Improving my skills’ was both an important outcome of these programs and one where occurrence matched importance. This was consistent by gender, location and jurisdiction, but differences appeared in analysing responses by degree of program participation. Those young people who reported low or no participation also reported lower changes in ‘improving my skills’ and also a greater difference between the importance and occurrence of this item than did the ‘high participation’ group.

b) Development of personal and inter-personal attitudes, behaviours and character: teamwork, leadership, individual responsibility, self-discipline and confidence

- personal (individual) development, including teamwork and leadership skills. (Ausyouth 2001b: 8)

Young people distinguished between behavioural and personal/social skill outcomes. They did not see these youth development programs as intending outcomes in ‘behaviour change’, and thus

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ranked changes in their own overall attitudes and behaviour relatively low in both expectations and actual outcomes. They also said that these areas were often not strongly promoted by schools and that young people were generally not clear about the intentions of programs in these outcome areas. The small continuing group was more positive about this area, expecting more and finally seeing ‘some’ improvement.

However, the young people consistently reported valuable outcomes of these programs in the areas of personal and social skills (cooperation and teamwork), and personal development (confidence or self-esteem – “just feeling good about themselves” – and leadership) but saw less change in the areas of individual responsibility and self-discipline. Young people reported that:

“I have lots more courage. I've learnt to appreciate myself more, knowing that I can do some of these things. I think higher of myself. It's pushed my self-esteem higher.”

At the end of 2003, young people reported that the development of social and interpersonal skill outcomes was very important and that this occurred frequently within their programs. Young people from different locations (metropolitan, rural and regional) ranked these similarly, however there were some gender differences: both males and females thought these areas were important but females were more convinced these had occurred in programs than were males.

Development of specific skills related to social development

Teamwork

In emphasising the importance of social development skills and of ‘understanding’ others, young people, teachers and providers made links with young people’s development of teamwork, the encouragement of cooperation, the promotion of tolerance and the building of trust. Young people talked about learning about people’s “strengths and weaknesses” and “what the kids in your team are good at and what they are not good at”. They frequently made statements such as:

“Co-operation and teamwork are very important if the group is to work well and achieve all the things they would like to do.”

Out of the nine ‘change’ areas, young people had second highest expectations for changes in ‘teamwork’ before their programs started. This was also the highest expectation for change at the start of the second year. While they indicated that they experienced reasonably positive changes here, the degree of change was somewhat less than that expected. In each year, it appeared that there were initial experiences of positive outcomes in teamwork skills and practices, but that these were not always sustained throughout the year. The small continuing group reflected the high expectations of the overall group about teamwork outcomes and also saw these as substantially achieved for them. Throughout the study, those young people who reported ‘low participation’ also reported much lower achievements of ‘teamwork’ than did those reporting ‘high participation’ and the disparity between these groups increased as the programs continued.

The ability to work cooperatively as a member of a team was identified as a desirable attribute when applying for jobs. It was one that could be included on a résumé, one the ‘boss’ would take into account, and thus one that would enhance an individual’s job prospect. One young person reported that he was “looking for a part-time job now and cadets will help me because they know I can get on with people”. (Further information on this is included in this report in the section on Use of Outcomes.)

Understanding, Friendship, Belonging and Cooperation

Many young people joined youth development programs because their friends were in it but at the same time they generally extended their friendships. When asked whether ‘being in the program increases your friendship group’, young people and school staff agreed that developing friendships through youth development programs was valuable, and that this did, in fact, occur. While program providers were confident that this occurred in their programs, some considered this as more of a side benefit rather than a direct intention of the program. Some young people agreed, for example:

“I didn’t really care about it. You don’t need a program to make friends when you can do it yourself.”

Student Outcomes
However, many young people named having more and better friendships as one of the best outcomes of youth development programs: it was third to gaining skills as the most commonly named outcome. This was not just for personal reasons, but because they linked the ability to make friends (including social skills) as helpful to them when meeting people they did not know in the future, including when they applied for a job or worked with others in a job. They saw it as being linked to understanding others’ views, and also to cooperation.

Young people commonly reported that they gained insights into others that were not available to them prior to joining the youth development program:

“You don’t see the ‘real them’ in normal lessons, but you get to know what they are like in [the program] and get more friends.”

They also reviewed previous judgements of their peers:

“It teaches you to get along with different people and to understand them better, even if you don’t particularly like them. Changes your initial opinion on people.”

Developments such as “learning to work together”, becoming “a strong group” and “learning to depend on each other and trust each other” were personally satisfying and exciting for teachers. These changes often addressed pre-existing issues with that year group or the school:

“We have so many people interacting with each other who normally wouldn’t do this and now they communicate with and acknowledge each other outside of (the program). You never would have believed at the start of the year that this would have happened.” (Teacher)

Providers shared the teachers’ enthusiasm, particularly if they had become familiar with the group of young people over the course of the program. Some believed that the social skills were an important outcome of the programs in that they provided a “sense of belonging to something worthwhile - for some, this is the first thing they really felt part of”.

Young people often pointed out that camps could be pivotal events that encouraged a sudden ‘leap’ in personal understanding, friendship development and cooperation, which was one of the reasons why they were quite popular. However, there was also an underlying theme of needing to allow time for this to occur. One teacher commented:

“The development of people/interpersonal skills is important for the student at school and in the broader community and this program provides those opportunities. They learn to get on with others, they were encouraged to listen to others and appreciate another point of view. It took a long time into the year before the kids were working co-operatively but eventually it appeared that friendships were developed.”

Another teacher highlighted the impact that friendships had on building a sense of belonging across ability or popularity differences:

“I saw students get more friendly with each other and this would not have happened normally. Some kids got included into groups and their opinions asked, who would normally be rejected.”

A student from the same program as this last teacher reinforced this change:

“We had this kid who always was by himself and didn’t have any friends, but now he joins in with my group. We talk to him and get him to say what he thinks.”

They linked these outcomes to specific aspects of program approaches that provided them with the opportunities to develop and test these social skills and behaviours in real situations.

Development of specific skills related to personal development

The programs allow young people to practise and improve skills in self development areas. The research asked about the development in confidence, leadership, individual responsibility and self-discipline.

Confidence

Young people expected to achieve strong changes in this area at the start of each year and, despite a dip in reported change in mid-first year, achievements were highest or second highest at the end of each year. Comments from the young people most frequently specified increased ‘confidence’ for them as an outcome of programs. Again, the reported changes from the continuing group of
young people were usually larger than those for the whole group of young people (i.e. changes in confidence accumulated with program experience), and the differences between the ‘high participation’ and ‘low participation’ groups increased within each year. Student comments indicated that experience of success, having fun, doing practical/challenging activities, developing different relationships, working co-operatively, and experiencing active participation in making program decisions are all important factors in building confidence.

Leadership

Overall, young people saw that moderate outcomes were achieved under the heading of ‘leadership’ skills, and this was closely reflected in the small continuing group. Again, there were higher expectations for changes expressed at the start of each year than were finally seen as achieved by the end of that year. These results were reasonably consistent between young people reporting high or low participation.

Young people’s comments indicated that, while leadership skills and opportunities were spoken about and sometimes provided early in the second year of programs, those program elements were not sustained. This was contrary to the stated objective of many programs that they aimed to develop leadership in young people and had a direct impact on the development of strong leadership skills and qualities within the young people. At the same time, young people were interested in opportunities to develop leadership skills and to learn how being a leader may be different from just being in charge of people or telling them what to do.

In responding to reports of this information, young people and teachers later asserted that there were strong gains in leadership through the program that were not always recognised:

“I don’t think many students understand that they are improving in leadership when they are doing some activities.” (Teacher)

Individual responsibility

Young people again saw that only moderate changes were achieved in ‘individual responsibility’. There were higher expectations for changes expressed at the start of each year than were finally seen as being achieved by the end of that year. In particular, the continuing group started with strong expectations of change, saw this as being achieved in the first year, but that there was little further change in this area in the second year. Such change related to the opportunities provided (as highlighted above), but it was also recognised that when young people indicated there had been little change, many also indicated that they were already quite good at being responsible for themselves. However, in looking at this outcome against perceptions of participation, there were large disparities between the ‘high participation’ and ‘low participation’ groups; opportunities for the development of responsibility are closely linked with the degree of participation experienced in program decision-making.

Self-discipline

Small changes in ‘self-discipline’ were both expected and achieved. By mid-year in the first year, this was the lowest area of change reported, but there was some improvement in the second year, and final outcomes were very similar to the initial expectations of change. The small continuing group consistently experienced more change in this area than did the overall cohort.

Even though young people were more uncertain about gains in the area of ‘self discipline’, some maintained that:

“(I’m) more disciplined - I used to be a bit of a ratbag but now I am the best in Year 9. I know I wouldn’t get a good job if I am undisciplined.”

c) Connection to community

- strengthened connection with community through relationships, participation and contribution to community. (Auspouth 2001b: p. 8)

Before looking at outcomes for young people in relation to community connection, it is important to explore what young people and these programs meant by this term.

Initially, young people were asked about why youth development programs existed. Their responses were classified as ‘altruistic’ (related to community service) or ‘personal’ (concerned
with their own skill development and so on. Most program information and practices stressed the individualised benefits (skills, personal and social development) for participants over the provision of community service or community connection. It was therefore not surprising that ‘altruistic reasons’ (including being part of a community and community service) were rated lower (19% of responses) by participants than personal knowledge/skills development (90% of responses) as the main reason for joining the programs. (Young people sometimes provided more than one response, and hence percentages add to more than 100%).

This balance, though perhaps not as strongly polarised, continued to characterise student responses throughout the research. However, it was recognised that many young people saw altruistic or community oriented goals as co-existing with goals for individual skill development and thus later analyses of results indicate that around 50-60% of young people mention some altruistic goals, still in contrast to the 75-90% of young people who mention some personal goals. Some young people noted that “the development of personal skills was seen as more important than helping others” while others said that “helping others and developing personal skills are equally important”.

The responses of young people to questions about the purpose of these programs provided some insight into ways that these programs construct connection to community as ‘community service’ and into the reasons why community service was seen to be important. In some cases, there was a somewhat egalitarian rationale, expressed through a view that “We can’t just take things for ourselves; we have to think about the community and work together” or “We help the community because they help us. It’s brought us together. The community see us doing positive things.” For others, community service provided a more instrumental opportunity for young people to “rectify the myth about us” and “if the community know that younger ones are helping that puts us in their good books and they know we can do things, not just muck around.” There was an even more pragmatic view that the “community pays for cadets through their taxes so we should give something back to them.”

This issue was targeted more explicitly in the second year of interviews. ‘Community service’ continued to be listed on the ‘changes’ sheet as an outcome and the statement ‘joining community groups’ was also included as a possible program outcome. Information about young people’s understanding and experience of ‘community service’ was also collected by asking both individual and focus group young people: “Youth development programs sometimes talk about community service. What do you think this means?”

A complex and multi-layered picture emerged from this open question. At the end of the second year of the research, this was developed further by asking participants to compare the importance of different meanings of ‘community involvement’.

**Young people’s understanding of the notions of ‘community’ and ‘community service’**

Many of the young people in the study had a positive and inclusive sense of community. It involved a clear sense of belonging: a good place to be, something to which they belonged and, perhaps because of that, something that needed to be looked after. As one student noted:

“The community is a place you feel comfortable to live in and if it’s in trouble you want to help out – like a friend you help out so they are happier and feeling better, you want to do that with the community too.”

While this may not be a sophisticated description of ‘community’, it does in an honest and open way identify some of the more formally acknowledged and important elements of reciprocity and belonging.

In the second year of this study, there was further exploration of young people’ understanding of community and how connection to community as a program outcome was addressed within these programs. Based on young people’ responses, the following four aspects of ‘community involvement’ were defined (drawing also here on approaches around environmental education):

- Doing things in a community setting;
- Learning about the community;
- Doing things with community groups; and
- Doing things for the community.
The responses of young people clearly indicated that their understanding was about ‘helping others’, ‘volunteerism’ or ‘service learning’ rather than ‘community development’ or ‘community capacity building’. Community service was seen as:

“Something that benefits the community, not one or two people” or “Keeping the environment clean. Learning about your environment. Learning about your community.”

For one young person, community service meant a more reciprocal arrangement:

“You help out with the community and give your knowledge to people that others might not have - you can add your knowledge to theirs and they can pass on things to you.”

For some young people, however, the language of ‘community service’ had a further meaning associated with compulsion or punishment. As one student reported: “I think with hearing ‘community service’ about being punished: ‘Sentenced to 100 hours community service.’” Others drew a more sophisticated comparison between sharing in decisions about service versus being required to do it: “We cleaned up the edge of the bypass. We liked that even though it’s a bit of dirty job. We wouldn’t like it if we had to do it at school because that’s different. It’s not fun and you can’t muck around and it’s a type of punishment.”

At the start of 2003, open responses from the continuing young people to questions of ‘community involvement’ were coded to indicate meanings associated with ‘in’, ‘with’ and ‘for’ community. At the end of the year, all core young people (plus young people in group interviews, as well as teachers and program providers) were asked about this more directly and asked to allocate 10 points across the five categories of ‘in’, ‘about’, ‘with’, ‘for’ and ‘none’.

A consistent pattern emerged: young people, individually and in groups, identified the main meaning of community involvement as ‘for community’ (i.e. community service) followed by ‘in community’ (i.e. located outside school), then ‘with community’ (i.e. involving construction or development of community with others) and finally ‘about community’ (i.e. a more formal study of community). This was fairly consistent across gender and across location.

Both teachers and providers placed ‘with community’, as a more active and ‘constructive’ meaning, at the top of their lists. Some of the young people agreed and showed an understanding of what is involved:

“I don’t agree with doing things just for the community… We didn’t really learn any skills from the community – we didn’t go out to the community and learn from the community: we did something for them, but not with them. We would have liked to do something with the community.”

Such young people started drawing distinctions between approaches that were ‘service-oriented’ and those that were ‘change-oriented’.

Differences in responses indicated that many students learnt more about the nature of community involvement during their programs; by the end of 2003 many in the sample had been in programs for two years and these reported more of an emphasis on doing things ‘with community’.

Given the emphasis placed on an outcome of doing things for the community, the research explored what this outcome meant in practice. Young people provided many examples of community activities in which they had engaged. Most were group-organised service activities rather than individual initiatives. The range listed below is extensive, but also clearly indicates the ways in which programs defined and constructed connections with community:

- **Community facilities**: Working bees at the tennis club, cleaning at the primary school, tidying the drill hall.
- **Community events**: Helping on ANZAC day, helping on Poppy Day, helping at the Royal Show, taking part in special parades and events.
- **Community sports**: Helping in canteen at the footy club, joining the Fishing Club and Surf Club, giving out water at the fun run, helping out with the pigeon racing.
- **Community culture**: Performing to old people, playing music at a hospital.
- **Community safety**: Doing life-saving courses ‘in case people may need us’, learning how to swim and rescue others, CFA junior volunteer, helping with first aid at the festival.
The importance and occurrence of connection to community outcomes

Having explored what young people and programs mean by community and community involvement, what does this research show about outcomes achieved in this area?

Expectations for community outcomes were the lowest of all the outcome areas examined at the start of the research and remained low throughout the study. Young people were generally not clear about the intentions of programs in this area. Practices were also highly variable between programs, with some not addressing or promoting such outcomes at all, while for others this was more central. At the end of the research, outcomes achieved were seen to be even lower than expectations – and also the lowest of all the outcomes suggested, with little change observed. This was particularly true for the small continuing group of young people who reported a low but reasonable expectation of community service outcomes at the start of a year, but finally a very low experience of any change in this area.

When participants were asked about the relative importance and occurrence of program outcomes, young people consistently rated ‘joining community groups’ at the bottom of their lists. They also reported the greatest discrepancy between this element’s importance and occurrence, indicating that it was ranked extremely low within program practices. However, many students also recognised the potential of community involvement to develop a sense of belonging and a sense of being part of a community.

Where community connection was planned as a program component, there were stronger outcomes in this area. When young people were involved in some form of community action, whether it be service-oriented or change-oriented, they reported a sense of belonging or inclusion – and an appreciation of respect from those outside their normal cohort of school contacts. This included young people from their own school with whom they had little contact and young people from other schools. Most importantly, however, it included members of the wider community. Community service involved “learning about your community, learning what you can do to help your community”; but it also involved “showing people that you care about others.” It was linked to active participation in decision-making about the nature of that community work. “Kids have to want to help the community,” said one group of young people. “They have to see that they will also get something out of it.”

Young people, teachers and program providers recognised that, as well as being a desirable outcome in its own right, there could also be other program outcomes for young people arising from their connection to and engagement with the community. Students consistently identified the importance of these programs as providing for the acquisition and demonstration of outcomes such as skills, knowledge, and teamwork within community settings. Other equally important and more personal outcomes emerged in the study. For example, community participation through engagement with fund raising, provided a boost in confidence for some young people.

Teacher and provider perspectives on student outcomes

In this study, teachers and providers also commented on outcomes for young people and indicated the nature of the evidence that was collected within programs about these outcomes. Initially they were asked about the benefits they anticipated for young people, schools, themselves and others,
and were later asked again to reflect on the benefits achieved. Further comments were requested in responses to the Discussion Papers in the third year of the study.

Both school and provider staff identified benefits and outcomes for young people as:

- the development of **knowledge** in the focus areas of the provider organisations, including their contributions to community and the part played by volunteers;
- the development of a range of **skills**, with a strong focus on those associated with particular program activities;
- the development of **personal and inter-personal skills**: **teamwork**, **leadership** and **communication**;
- the development of **positive attitudes and beliefs**, such as **self-esteem**, **confidence**, a sense of **responsibility**, **independence** or **initiative**, respect for and **tolerance** of others, and a commitment to the value of **community involvement**;
- the development of a **positive attitude to school**;
- exposure of young people to possible **job pathways**, either via the provider organisation, or through the opportunity to gain awards and certificates for their work; and
- the provision of **new and alternative experiences and learning opportunities** (than those otherwise available in schools), and a greater **openness** to different experiences and understandings, particularly to young people who do less well academically.

**Evidence**

How do teachers and providers know that these outcomes have occurred, or that they were attributable to the program?

The challenge to programs of measuring benefits for young people and for institutions was a daunting one for most staff. They didn’t see themselves as sufficiently resourced with knowledge, skills, time or funds to do this in an effective way. The most available and viable forms of evidence were anecdotes and observations, sometimes (but not always) with documentation of these. Some, mainly providers, directly said that they didn’t know what evidence was available.

When asked specifically about evidence later in the research, teachers largely replied on the basis of their observations with statements such as “they don’t whinge as much now”, or “they’re easier to get along with”.

Another program backed up their stories with reference to photos taken and displayed around the school:

“The photos from the camp are evidence of kids’ enjoyment, teamwork and negotiation.”

This program also listed comparative observations:

“We have so many people interacting with each other who normally wouldn’t do this and now they communicate with and acknowledge each other outside of [the program]. You never would have believed at the start of the year that this would have happened.”

Others also cited changed behaviour in the school context: increased willingness to take on coordination roles, ability to see projects through to completion, changed practices in relation to the environment. In addition, some ‘objective’ achievements were listed: increased attendance rates at school (one program provider noted that some young people turned up **only** for the program), an increase in the number of young people from youth development programs in leadership roles elsewhere in the school, numbers obtaining the Duke of Edinburgh Awards (one school specifically noted that 17 of the 19 young people achieved this), acceptance into Officer Training, achievement of Certificate II courses, and, more as a hope of providers, retention as volunteers within the organisation.

However, programs still struggled to evaluate outcomes and some recognised this:

“We are not good with measuring this; it is often a gut feeling and about what we observe. We notice this by the level of participation in the program and with other group members, behaviour in the yard has improved, the friendships that have been developed between students and us... The
launch of the program was seen as a big PR push for the school with outside dignitaries and parents coming in to an event catered for by the school’s catering service (and outcomes are) measured by the attendance and the ongoing commentary about the event.” (Teacher)

Key ideas:

- The research tracked self-reported changes in outcomes for young people in nine areas of ‘skills’, ‘knowledge’, ‘attitudes’, leadership’, ‘teamwork’, ‘community service’, ‘individual responsibility’, ‘self-discipline’ and ‘confidence’. Young people reported positive program outcomes in all of these outcome areas. The biggest improvement they reported was in their ‘skills’, ‘knowledge’, ‘confidence’ and ‘teamwork’. This pattern was consistent with their expectations for change before they began their programs. There was less improvement reported in the areas of ‘leadership’, ‘individual responsibility’ and ‘community service’.
- When perceptions of the core group of young people on the nine outcome items were compared, the relationship between them remained fairly consistent across schools and population groups (gender, location, ethnicity, jurisdiction), and over time.
- Young people valued the outcomes achieved through these programs: ‘improving skills’, ‘help in getting a job’, joining community groups’, ‘learning theory’, ‘getting a certificate’, ‘learning to obey orders’, ‘working positively with people’ and ‘understanding each other better’.
- Overall, these outcomes were regarded as more important at the end of a year than they were at the beginning. In almost all the outcomes areas tested, young people rated the importance of the outcome as greater than its actual occurrence within their program.

Knowledge and skills

- Substantial changes were expected in knowledge in program-related areas. While these were consistently achieved, outcomes in this area were less than anticipated. Improvement in overall skills was the largest overall outcome, but was also greater than had been predicted before the programs started. It was the only outcome area that exhibited such a consistent overall increase.

Personal and social skills

- Outcomes in personal and social development were strongly valued: teamwork, cooperation, confidence and self-esteem. Learning to understand each other as people helped young people to develop skills in teamwork and cooperation, promoted tolerance, and built group trust.

Community connection

- Programs provided opportunities to help others, but reasons of self-interest, such as personal skill development, were seen to be more important.
- Expectations for community service outcomes were the lowest of all the areas examined. Outcomes in this area were even lower than initial expectations – and also the lowest of all areas.
- Programs most frequently constructed connection to community as ‘community service’ such as ‘helping others’, ‘volunteerism’ or ‘service learning’ rather than ‘community development’ or ‘community capacity building’.
- ‘Joining community groups’ was ranked at the bottom of lists of possible outcomes. There was also greatest discrepancy here between this element’s importance and occurrence.

Staff and provider responses

- School and provider staff identified benefits and outcomes for students as the development of knowledge in the focus areas of the provider organisations, a range of skills including personal and inter-personal skills, positive attitudes and beliefs including a positive attitude to school, exposure of students to possible job pathways, and the provision of new and alternative experiences.
- There was little evidence of formal processes for the recording of these outcomes at the local program level. Teachers and program providers relied on observation and anecdotal information. They generally lacked skills and resources to develop more formal evaluation of outcomes.
Student Use of Outcomes

The previous section of the Report outlined achievement of immediate outcomes for young people. This section reports on the further use of these outcomes beyond the programs and in everyday life within a brief time period. It specifically looks at examples in the areas of employment, continued education and community involvement.

It was very important to the young people in this study that there were practical and useful outcomes from what they learned, and that they were both able to test their learning in real situations and also experience recognition of increased competence and value: “A lot of young people want to get out there and do stuff and test what you have to do.”

Participants were asked to indicate how they had been using what they were learning and developing through their programs. They were asked at one stage: “If I were watching you, what would I see you doing that might show these changes?” In the final year of the research, over one third of the young people who were involved in the original individual interviews in 2002 were re-interviewed to find out whether and how they used what they had learned or gained in their youth development programs in subsequent everyday situations at school, home or in the community. For most of these young people, there had been limited time and opportunities to exhibit use of outcomes outside school, and many of the responses and examples related to application within relatively restricted in-school areas. A comprehensive understanding of their use of program outcomes would need to be gained over a much longer time period.

Transferability of outcomes to everyday situations

All but one of the young people interviewed said they had used the knowledge, skills and attitudes they developed in the program in some way, although three were less sure about this. The most commonly used areas were ‘confidence’ (89%) and ‘teamwork’ (81%), with over half also using their ‘overall skills’, their ‘leadership’ skills and applying the ‘overall attitudes’ they developed. Close to half believed that they continued to demonstrate the ‘individual responsibility’ they developed through the program. On the other hand, use of ‘community service’ and ‘self-discipline’ were reported by only approximately a quarter of the young people.

Chart 6: Use of outcomes: 2004 follow-up interviews
These transferable outcomes were applied in many different ways in young people’s lives. The following themes were strongly apparent:

- **Use of practical knowledge and skills for oneself**: Young people often talked about first aid or some of the other specific skills they learned and now used, e.g. camping and survival knowledge, swimming, and organisation. They provided several examples such as this:
  
  “First aid - all the knowledge you get when you do things on camps and in the bush and survival stuff.”

- **Use of practical knowledge and skills for others**: Young people were conscious that they could apply their knowledge and skills for the benefit of others, including doing community service, and explained how they did this. This often involved feeling more confident. Some young people reported that they could not identify any opportunities to date for doing things for others, particularly community service, but would be able to do these things if asked. Practical examples of the application of outcomes in support of others included stories such as the following:
  
  “In the holidays we were in a shop getting some meat and the man cut a big bit off his hand with the meat slicer and Mum and I were able to help him.”

- **Demonstrated increased communication skills**: This was often linked to comments about confidence, teamwork and leadership, but sometimes young people focused specifically on improvements in their communication skills, for example:

  “I have been able to speak more with a big group in a class - I can do that more easily. I had to speak to people I didn’t know in doing the volunteer placement. That is also for confidence.”

- **More positive attitudes about self and others**: Some young people were very clear that an attitude shift had made an impact on their own lives and how they now approached other people, particularly those whom they may have judged negatively. This was also often connected to demonstrating confidence and teamwork. They said things like:

  “I am a lot more comfortable with myself now … I am a lot more accepting and not judging of other people, which I used to do when I was younger, so because of that I have made many new friends.”

- **Demonstrated increased confidence**: This was strongly evident and often linked to positive changes in skills and a range of attitudes, most particularly communication:

  “Be a bit more confident in myself in doing activities. I stand straighter, am more forward, don’t hang back, talk louder, a bit more out there, not so shy around people I don’t know, especially people behind shop counters - I used to have a problem with that.”

  “I give things a go - I got that from cadets. I learnt to try things I wouldn’t try before I joined cadets. You just feel more confident and you know if you give it a go you can probably do it.”

- **Demonstrated increased individual responsibility**: Young people reported that other people had sometimes noticed and commented on this change, while others had noticed it themselves because of their changed behaviour, for example:

  “I’m a bit more responsible with my personal stuff and I stand up if I know I have done something wrong and don’t let others take the blame, particularly at home with my brothers or in the class when I say something.”

- **Demonstrated increased teamwork, cooperation and support**: Comments about how young people have transferred their teamwork skills brought forward some examples of cooperation or supporting others, such as the following:

  “If I have to work in a group, I seem to understand everyone’s ideas more, listen more to people and you know how to join all of those ideas together to make a better idea.”
• **Willingness to take up leadership roles**: Participants had found different avenues to apply and experiment with leadership, citing examples such as:

> “At work I am [the team] leader.”

> “This is really important and I enjoy being involved in leadership around the school and community.”

• **Improved academic learning/knowledge**: These changes related to knowledge, or to being more self-disciplined or organised. Ways that young people reported applying their learning to their schooling included statements such as:

> “Has given me a bit of self-discipline to sit down and do my work rather than leave it to the last minute and have to rush – some of my grades were better.”

Although most of these young people believed that their youth development program had played a significant role in their immediate learning and then in the transferability of these outcomes to other areas of their lives, they also acknowledged other influences, such as sport, other active subjects such as outdoor education, community youth programs, Student Councils and work experience.

While young people directly attributed changes to participation in these programs, others also acknowledged that such growth may simply have been the result of ‘getting older’:

> “As you get older, you get better – so it’s not just because of cadets.”

**Employment**

At the end of 2003, young people strongly said that youth development programs should both help them in getting a job (85% said this was important or very important) and provide certificates for their efforts (72%).

Most young people qualified their responses about the relationship between the program and future employment. The vast majority did not believe this was the main purpose of the program, but felt that there were likely to be future links: “it shouldn’t be the focus of it but important things we do prepare us for our future in the workforce.” In contrast, for some young people in defence force cadets, employment was more of a priority as they saw involvement in a cadets program as a direct step towards being accepted into the defence forces. Young people in some rural areas viewed the program as needing a greater focus on helping young people gain employment.

Participants were confident that their program would assist them in employment (64% said they thought it happened somewhat or a lot), though they said that a focus on ‘helping me get a job’ occurred less than it should. For example, they said that such a program “gives you an edge. Gives you something to take back with you. It shows that the program wasn’t just about fun; it can be beneficial to the rest of your life.” A strong emphasis was placed on being exposed to different ideas and skills and, importantly, on gaining experience, believing that employers would value this. Participants also made strong and clear links between specific skills such as having confidence, good communication skills and teamwork and the requirements for employment (96%); they specifically mentioned “getting on with other people” (97%).

Many young people were keen to include their youth development experience in their résumé. For example, they explained it was important to have certificates that you could “use in your résumé and (it) helps with jobs as each workplace needs a First Aid officer and it shows your work in the program hasn’t gone to waste. It proves it and you can show them to people...” It would both demonstrate their skills and abilities and was also evidence of being able to take responsibility: “it shows people you are responsible and can put your mind to things to achieve that.” For one student, if you included the fact that you were in a youth development program on your résumé: “they will be impressed. They will say you’re better than the kid who did not do cadets”.

A similar orientation to employment was also made in the area of ‘obeying orders’. In contrast to researcher expectations, this was a strongly important area (86% said it was important or very important). Young people said: “You have to learn to obey orders - everyone does - if we didn’t do that we wouldn’t be able to work together - you need to know that when you get a job.”
School and provider staff were also clear that it was important that youth development programs assisted young people to get jobs and gain certificates, but that it was not the prime purpose of the programs: “don’t think that is the goal of it, it’s more about skill development which helps with jobs down the track.” They gave similar responses to the young people about why and how this could occur, naming the different qualifications they could put on their résumé that employers recognise and believing that the gaining of generic skills were also helpful in gaining and maintaining employment.

Approximately one third of the young people reported in the follow-up interviews that their youth development program had assisted them in gaining employment (mostly in part-time work) while more than another third hadn’t yet tried to gain employment (a few of these thought that the program might help them in the future). Approximately a further third of the group was not confident that their program experience had or would have an impact on their ability to gain future employment, but said that other more commonly recognised pathways helped them: work experience, family/friends networks and being on the Student Representative Council.

Based on this information it would be unwise to draw a strong connection between the experiences and skills gained through youth development programs and an enhanced ability to gain employment within this period of time. On the other hand, as follow-up interviews occurred 8-12 months after completion of a one or two year program, and the participants were only 14-17 years old, it is also premature to argue that there was a limited connection. Longer-term follow-up is required before this question can be more adequately addressed.

**Continued education/lifelong learning**

Teachers and providers saw youth development programs as being able to support young people to sharpen their purpose for being at school as well as start appreciating the idea of lifelong learning. For some, the evidence was clear: “This program has been very helpful for a number of students. It has been the main reason some stay at school.” (Teacher) “Many would not have remained at school if not for this program. The approach taken has really engaged them.” (Teacher)

Similarly, some young people commented that being in the youth development program had a direct effect on their decisions to stay at school. Sometimes this meant staying longer than they had previously intended or, for others, it was the difference between finishing school or not. One young person stated that “cadets helped me to stay at school” while another said: “I am still at the school – when I thought I would leave.” However, these were the only young people who explicitly confirmed that this had happened. A few others suggested that they planned to finish school anyway, while others were more non-committal.

There was a more indirect outcome of programs in this regard in that program involvement made the school experience more enjoyable and built a sense of belonging to the peer group, and both of these aspects influenced later decisions to stay or leave school. When asked if being in the program encouraged them to be more actively involved in something within or beyond school, almost half the young people cited examples of becoming more involved within school, and linked this to their program:

“I wanted to do something this year because [the program] is only for two years, so I joined up with Chocoholics which was started by last year’s English teacher. We planned a pancake day and are also planning [school’s name] Idol.”

Almost half identified that their involvement encouraged them to take up or continue learning activities outside the school, for example:

“I am a lot more keen on doing outdoor type things - no way that I would have gone on the Year 9 camp but did with [the program]. I want to redo my Bronze Medallion and go higher up in Royal Life Saving and am interested in doing more camping and things I did in [the program].”

Some young people reported that the program had a direct impact on decisions about their future intentions, including further education. For example, about a third of the young people indicated that the program shaped their decisions about what subjects to choose or what career to pursue:

“Since we went to the hospital for our Community Challenge it’s made me realise that I do really want to work with kids, as I wasn’t too sure what I wanted to do, but now I know for sure.”
In addition to setting an orientation for continuing or returning to education, the term *lifelong learning* is used to indicate an orientation towards viewing one’s life experiences within a ‘learning framework’ that may or may not gain formal accreditation, i.e. through a recognition of current competence or credit process or through a process of reflection and growth. Many young people were aware of the importance of opportunities for learning and their future application, making comments such as:

“You need the things you learn in cadets all through your life.”

A further aspect of lifelong learning relates to empowerment and building confidence among young people, i.e. to believe in their personal capacity to learn and then act on that learning as individuals and as citizens (examples of this in relation to making contributions to the community are outlined in the sections below). Young people were able to give evidence of transferring the confidence they had gained to everyday situations and that this was building a lifelong learning perspective for them. Their comments related to:

- **Recognising the immediate impact of learning**, for example: “I’ve changed as a person. I’m a lot more confident in what I do from day to day.”
- **Believing in their ability to face future challenges and overcome (or bounce back from) problems (i.e. resilience)**, for example: “I enjoy challenges and have confidence to take them on.”
- **Recognising they are building on previous learning**, for example: “I think of it more that I have been through this before, not as doing activ8, but I know how to approach it because I may have done it in activ8.”

Further long-term study is required to know whether or not young people act on these intentions, and how this occurs.

**Community involvement: Volunteering and continued involvement with organisation**

Young people saw substantial learning outcomes as arising from their active participation and engagement with their communities. Many of these outcomes related to the acquisition of new skills that were gained and tested in community settings.

Young people were also asked whether there was evidence that this relationship went the other way: whether young people saw themselves now as more involved with and part of their communities, playing continuing roles as community members and as active citizens.

A sense of belonging or being part of a community, including enhanced knowledge of community, continued for some young people. Some young people reported examples like:

“I still know more about how the community is set up with the volunteers and different people and how it is all run.”

In the most general sense, program participation provided a sense of community that was then sought elsewhere:

“Definitely felt a part of something when I was in [the program] – felt like it was a good group of people who got to go and have fun all the time … it was a good thing, I want to keep doing that now, as I like the feeling of being part of a big group that got so much achieved.”

However, for many of these young people, their community remained primarily the school community with few opportunities for community connections to occur outside that domain.

For some young people, youth development programs appeared to have established a foundation that might lead to future involvement as a community volunteer, but this did not yet appear to be significant within this sample. It was not clear that the young people were aware of the importance of volunteers in their community. While they saw doing things ‘for the community’ as important

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and provided numerous examples of where this occurred, connections between these activities and formal volunteering were not as obvious to the young people as could be assumed.

In the final interviews it was also possible to establish the extent to which the young people had maintained a level of involvement with the provider organisations after leaving the programs. Teachers recognised possibilities such as:

“The program helps the students and helps the SES. More than half of the local SES group are now young people who came into it through the cadets program. The students have a good time being part of the adult SES group. They have brought new energy to the local SES.” (Teacher)

However, none of the 30 young people who were interviewed reported that they had maintained active involvement with the provider (though one was considering this) and only two (7%) had had any contact at all. Approximately 20% indicated that they had joined some other community organisation and eight of the young people (27%) stated that, while they had not kept up the contact with the service provider of the program with which they were previously involved, they had carried out some form of volunteer work such as: “Went and worked in a soup kitchen organised through the school this year.”

Others highlighted continuing voluntary involvement with other in-school activities such as “School leadership activities”, “Treasurer of the SRC” and “Youth Parliament”.

The low level of continued involvement was not unexpected: time was a limiting factor, particularly in rural areas where young people lived some way from the town in which the youth development programs were carried out. As school work became more demanding in senior school studies, some cited this as a reason for leaving the youth development program and not having further involvement.

Youth development programs provided many young people with their first experience of volunteering or community service. Provider organisations were confident that there were potential long-term benefits likely to arise from these initial experiences. Their hope was that, while only a relative small number of young people continued to participate in voluntary activities, some would re-establish their commitment to voluntary service once study or family commitments were less or, in the case of the armed services, embark on a career with the respective services.

### Key ideas:

- Approximately a year after completing their programs, all the young people had used the knowledge, skills and attitudes they developed in some way. Most commonly they reported using strengthened ‘confidence’, ‘teamwork’ and ‘leadership’ skills in real life situations. On the other hand, use of ‘community service’ and ‘self-discipline’ were least reported – by only approximately a quarter of the young people.
- Approximately one third of the young people reported that their youth development program had assisted them in gaining employment, mainly in part-time work. While ‘helping to get a job’ and ‘providing certification’ were important aspects of programs, employment outcomes were not seen as the main purpose of the programs. However, involvement in a cadets program was seen as a direct step into being accepted into the defence forces.
- The program had an impact on some young people’s decisions about further education, directly encouraging them to stay at school or making the overall school experience more enjoyable and hence influencing later decisions to stay at or leave school.
- Many young people were aware of the importance of continued learning and had increased confidence and resilience as learners.
- Community connections continued for some young people through membership of school and community groups, enhanced knowledge of their community and a sense of belonging within it. However, none of the young people had maintained an active involvement with their provider and very few had had further contact. Others highlighted continuing voluntary involvement with school activities.
- While youth development programs might lead some participants to future involvement as a community volunteer, but this did not yet appear to be significant within this sample.
The outcomes for teachers, schools and program providers are summarised in this section of the Report.

Schools and community agencies implement youth development programs because of the opportunities and the outcomes they deliver for young people. Schools, teachers and program providers play a critical role in the establishment and maintenance of these programs at the local community level. They also bring their own intentions, hopes and aspirations to their involvement. While young people are the primary beneficiaries, this research also recognises that there are significant outcomes for others: teachers, schools and program providers in particular. One cannot have programs having such a profound impact on the lives of many young people without them also having an impact on the lives and work of many of those involved in the provision of the programs.

Throughout this research, teachers and program providers were interviewed about program processes, their perceptions of the outcomes for young people and also the outcomes for themselves and their organisations. Though this was not the primary focus of this research, they also provided an insight into the significance of the programs and the impact they had on the lives of those involved.

Outcomes for teachers

Teachers were attracted to these programs because the programs improved the effectiveness of their work and enabled them to develop closer and different relationships with young people.

- Teachers expressed a strong personal commitment to the achievement of positive student outcomes and expressed satisfaction at seeing this happen.

- The different and improved relationships with young people improved outcomes:

  “It’s been rewarding; it’s one of the most rewarding things I did this year. You just see those changes and having that flexibility to have that different relationship with kids rather than just task-oriented teaching. It filters through. And the better relationship you have with the kid, the easier things become in other subjects as well. It is rewarding because it is not ’you’ and ’them’ anymore; it is ’us together’. We have broken down some of the power differences.” (Teacher)

Many of the teachers valued the opportunity to work with young people in a different way, witnessed their enjoyment and achievements, and saw them develop stronger and closer relationships both with each other and with teachers.

- Teachers talked of their experience in youth development programs changing their approach to teaching (particularly around decision-making and practical applications of learning) and changing their view of young people:

  “This is very different to what happens in the normal classes at this school. It has broadened the way I think about teaching. I can’t see how I could go back to the old way. The students want to influence what is happening and the teacher helps guide and negotiates.” (Teacher)
Outcomes for Teachers, Schools and Program Providers

- There was a strong **social justice focus** in individual teachers’ reasons (as well as those of schools – see next section) for being involved in youth development programs, with teachers stressing the importance of program funding so that individual young people were not excluded from activities if they could not afford them.

  “You go to places that usually you have to pay for, so this doesn’t cut out people who don’t have much money in the family.”

- Teachers also gained **new insights** into the provider organisation and its work, and often developed **new skills** themselves through their participation. Youth development programs provided some teachers with the opportunity to pursue a passion, or an area of interest of their own, or to develop new skills themselves.

  The choice of program provider was sometimes influenced by the teacher involved having an existing involvement or contact with the local provider organisation. Some of these teachers had initiated the school’s involvement with the program, and a few were either members of the provider organisation in their personal time or had a past history with the provider.

- Teachers also saw **personal benefits** in being involved although they were uncertain that there would be any career benefits: of the eight teachers who responded to this question, four thought there would be, but four were not sure.

  “It might add another string to your bow, so organisation wise it may be seen as helpful. Don’t think it is going to advance your career at all. Maybe having a broader school involvement is helpful in developing skills in that sense, and liaising with outside organisations.” (Teacher)

- There were also less positive outcomes for teachers, particularly in terms of increased **workloads**. The school-based program coordinator was involved in program administration, liaison and management, as well as having direct involvement with young people in delivering and/or participating in the program. Seven of the twelve school program coordinators said that the youth development program was part of their teaching load, though all were putting in significantly more time than that formally allocated. In the other schools, program coordinators used their non-contact and/or personal time to support the program.

  They estimated that they allocated, on average, approximately nine hours per week to the program, although this varied according to the activities occurring. Most time went into preparation and delivery (three to four hours for each aspect) with some time required for follow-up (about one to two hours per week).

  “The main difficulty we face is time; trying to balance normal class preparation as well as organise a fully functioning unit is quite time consuming. I need to have more time freed up on my timetable to enable me to run the unit as it should be run.” (Teacher)

### Outcomes for schools

School staff reported three main organisational reasons for choosing to bring youth development programs into schools:

- direct benefits to young people in terms of enhanced **outcomes**;
- development of program **alternatives** particularly to sport-based programs; and
- development of new **connections** with **community** (service or understanding).
There was specific consideration of these reasons in choosing a particular program provider, but it was also important that what the program provider was offering was in congruence with school values and intentions, including areas such as 'enterprise education'.

Schools found state-sponsored youth development programs attractive because of their funding, community service focus or links with community organisations, opportunity for skill development particularly in leadership and teamwork, ability to cater for a range of interests and abilities through practical activities, access to required expertise (also facilitated by funding), and the provision of a structure for doing a ‘different’ program.

Teachers and program providers consistently identified benefits of youth development programs for schools as:

- **The diversification of school offerings**, particularly (in some cases) for marginalised young people, in order to provide increased skills for young people and the introduction of young people to a greater range of people:
  
  “It is another activity that gives the kids a choice in the life of the college.” (Teacher)

- **Provision of a curriculum program at no cost.** Schools were conscious of equity and inclusion principles, emphasising the implications of providing funding for formal programs rather than simply organising similar activities and attaching them to existing subjects or as extra-curricular options. This meant that young people were not excluded from activities due to their costs.
  
  “The school sees it as a way to offer another option but at no cost to the school and run as part of the school program.” (Teacher)

- **Student connectedness**: the opportunity for students to belong to an organisation or community, with resulting changes to behaviour and motivation:
  
  “Particularly for the at risk kids: it provides them with an opportunity to be successful, to have input into their own community that is seen as meaningful.” (Teacher)

- **Provision of resources** for the school: human (trained students, personnel), physical (equipment) and curriculum (courses, materials):
  
  “We also got a camera so the students can look at their performance and adjust things, but that has been used in other subject as well.” (Teacher)

- **Increased community linkages** and **profile** for the school. Schools gained new insights into the provider organisation and its work, and the range of skills within the school were increased through staff participation. The relationship with the provider organisation enabled schools to explore new ways of working with their communities.
  
  “They get more publicity profile in the community as the school is seen to be valuing and supporting young people in the contributions they are making. The community are seeing the young people as making contributions.” (Provider)

Youth development programs provided the opportunity for schools to be out in the community and therefore more visible through their involvement with the program provider.

“This program is a real partnership between the local Police and the school. The history of the program is very positive and [the] community now helps us.” (Teacher)

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*Enterprise education aims to develop effective foundation skills and competencies in students as well as a capacity for ongoing learning to help them take a proactive, self-determining and flexible approach to shaping their own future. It provides students with experiential learning, so that they have a context within which to practice the enterprising skills and attributes developed.*
Outcomes for program providers

These programs are only part of the provider organisations' involvement in youth development. Some already identified ‘working with young people’ as a major component of their core goals and activities, although they may not have named the work as ‘youth development’ until relatively recently. This broader focus was often facilitated - organisationally and financially - by the development and promotion of the state-sponsored programs.

Provider organisations identified several areas of outcomes for themselves:

- Most provider organisation staff viewed youth development programs in schools as an opportunity to provide young people and schools with a **positive and accurate organisational image**. The programs exposed young people within the broader community to the organisation and the services it offered.

  “To develop awareness of others in the world. To develop cooperation, teamwork, independence, leadership.” (Student)

- These programs also enabled the organisation to **achieve its larger social goals**. As well as greater understanding and promotion of the organisation’s work, there was awareness of its underlying values and ethos. The young people therefore made a contribution to the longer term objectives of the organisations.

  “Opportunity to pass on the message. Students are at a critical age - the right time to pass on the message about conservation - a chance to influence the next generation.” (Provider)

In doing so, some providers wished to change organisational cultures:

“Getting the swimming and water safety back into the schools because we have been out of the schools for a long time. Kids go through and do swimming lessons but don’t learn rescue skills, doing it without putting themselves in danger. Also, the people doing the teaching may have lapsed qualifications in rescue skills if they have our qualifications, so may teach things that are now incorrect.” (Provider)

- Some providers, particularly those involved with the defence services, directly mentioned **recruitment** as the primary goal:

  “Recruitment - this is the whole bottom line for cadets. Some of these kids will go on to join the Army. Research says that about 22% to 25% of those who join the Army or Reserves have been in Cadets.” (Provider)

This was also a desired outcomes for other groups, with a non-defence services provider saying that the program helped “recruit members for the SES. [It] shows school students what it is like in the SES”. This orientation varied from provider to provider and also depended on to whom one spoke within each provider organisation. The balance between direct recruitment and achievement of social goals through these programs, remains an on-going tension amongst and within provider organisations:

“Our goals are to see other kids enjoying our programs, seeing our program being delivered in numerous ways, and seeing the kids doing something that we know works. … if they come back to (the provider) at some stage in their life, that is terrific. My goal is to not go out there and sell (the provider); my goal is to make sure that the (program) runs and runs well, and all the kids know they could continue if they wish through (the provider). Some of the people around me think that we should promote (the provider) more and this is an ongoing discussion in the organisation. … It is not what it is all about and that issue shouldn’t be there; it’s not a membership (issue). It’s about kids getting a different perspective and doing youth development as part of their education.” (Provider)

Teachers saw that these provider organisations had broader social goals, but still saw the benefits for the providers in terms of volunteer recruitment:

“It introduces the students to volunteer work that may carry over when they are adults. In other words it may help breed another generation of volunteers.” (Teacher)
Outcomes for Teachers, Schools and Program Providers

- One organisation used their participation in state-sponsored programs as an opportunity to **review their work with young people** and to consider making changes in their organisational culture that fit with the “good practice in youth development” (Ausyouth, 2001a). The worker within another provider organisation continued to see experiences in this program as an opening to promote greater commitment to and participation for young people within the organisation as a whole.

- The personal benefits for provider organisation staff are (as with teachers) located in **job satisfaction**: seeing young people tackle new experiences, achieve personal goals and gain confidence in their abilities. Some also saw it as reinforcing beliefs about the role of young people in their own organisation.

> “The best part of the job is seeing kids performing well. I see kids doing some really great work, so having input into quality activities is satisfying.” (Provider)

### Key ideas:

- Schools, teachers and program providers brought strong intentions, hopes and aspirations to their involvement.

#### Teachers

- Teachers expressed a strong personal commitment to the achievement of positive student outcomes and expressed satisfaction at seeing this happen. The funding of a program was important so that young people who might otherwise not have been able to afford to participate in these activities, were able to be included in the program.

- There were also positive outcomes for teachers in different and improved relationships with young people that often flowed into other teaching contexts, changed approaches to teaching, new insights into the provider organisation and its work, and development of new skills. They did not all agree that there would be any long-term career benefits. However, there were also increased workloads as a result of their involvement.

#### Schools

- Program funding made these programs attractive to schools, so that schools’ and students’ identified needs were met without excluding some young people because they could not afford the **costs** involved. Other positive outcomes for schools were identified as the direct benefits to students in terms of enhanced outcomes, the diversification of school offerings, provision of a curriculum program at no cost, provision of resources for the school, and development of new connections between school and community.

#### Program providers

- Young people were exposed to a range of activities that were fundamental to the services offered by provider organisations. The programs educated young people and schools about the work of provider organisations, and promoted a positive and more accurate organisational image.

- While some provider organisations saw these programs as directly related to recruitment of new members for the organisation, there were widely differing views of the importance of this. Defence service programs were most likely to stress recruitment objectives.

- Individual provider personnel indicated benefits in terms of job satisfaction, seeing young people tackle new experiences, achieve personal goals and gain confidence in their abilities.
Program Approaches That Influence Outcomes

Program Approaches that Influence Outcomes

Having looked at outcomes for young people, this section of the Report explores the ways these are shaped by program approaches. In four areas – recruitment and inclusion, specific learning approaches, youth participation and the relationship between schools and program providers – comparisons are made between the importance and occurrence of elements, and elements linked to outcomes. Each learning approach element is discussed in more detail.

The outcomes for young people are shaped by the approaches that youth development programs adopt or develop, whether these occurred in a pre-planned manner or evolved over the course of the program. Four themes emerged as significant in this study:

- the recruitment and inclusion of young people;
- the learning approaches adopted;
- youth participation in program decision-making; and
- the nature of the relationship between program providers and schools.

Theme 1: Recruitment for and inclusion in programs

Schools’ purposes in offering youth development programs affected approaches taken both to the recruitment of participants, and within the activities offered. These approaches had clear messages for young people about inclusive or exclusive attitudes and behaviour. Valuing inclusion in youth development meant both encouraging a diverse range of young people to join programs and also operating a program to create a sense of belonging for young people. Such an approach could help young people learn to build respect for and care of each other across difference.

This section draws on participants’ views on who should be involved in these programs, how and why young people choose programs and the implications of these issues for program outcomes.

Intentions: who programs are for

Different school approaches to program advertising and selection were closely linked to overall school philosophies, to the intentions in offering youth development programs, and to the ways in which schools saw youth development programs as differing from other things young people did.

Teacher and provider responses indicated three broad and possible intentions:

- Programs were specifically targeted to ‘at risk’ or marginalised young people to provide an alternative approach to success.

  “Young people who have not been academically inclined have shone in the program because it hit their buttons. Some young people don’t attend a lot of classes but always attend the program. For others this engaged them with school when they were drifting off.” (Teacher)

- Programs were targeted to already active young people, specifically those with a demonstrated interest or career path in environmental, community or outdoors activities.

  “The school can reward those kids who are good and give them some extra benefits. It builds a bridge with them as [these] kids often see all of the energy, time and money going into the kids who are not so good, with little for them.” (Teacher)

- Programs aimed to involve a diverse group of young people:
Youth Development Longitudinal Study: Doing Positive Things

Program Approaches That Influence Outcomes

“...It gives kids a chance to achieve when they are not going to do this academically... they just don’t do any work. This gives them something to work for. (Plus) we do have kids who are academically bright and everyone respects them in the group...” (Teacher)

All research participants were asked to discuss who should and could join the program: the importance and occurrence of inclusion in their program. It was strongly agreed that, not only was it very important for anyone to be able to join the youth development program, but that on the whole this was what occurred. Program providers were the most emphatic that this was important.

All groups specifically rejected seeing programs as exclusively or mainly for young people with problems (whether with learning or in managing behaviour).

“It probably doesn’t feel really good to be put aside and have everyone knowing that you are there because you have a problem.”

However, many participants supported the inclusion and involvement of these young people and suggested that a mix of young people should be involved. They made statements such as:

“We are all equal so we all can join ... You need all sorts in cadets, not just the smart kids or the ones who are good at everything ... It’s for everyone, everyone can get something out of it.”

“Anyone can join because it’s their choice. It’s not only for kids with problems - they can join like anyone else.”

A young man who voluntarily identified as being ‘dyslexic’ commented that: “the program should be for everyone; it means we have something to do with young people who struggle with learning.”

Young people interviewed showed a sense of ‘otherness’ about ‘at risk young people’, saying that programs would be good ‘for them’ and they would ‘get help’. For example, they said: “It’s not just for kids with problems but there are more kids like this we could help. We do discuss this and try to see how we can do this.” This implies that the young people who responded in this way, did not see themselves as ‘young people with problems’:

“... not their fault that they had problems and cadets might help them with their problem – it might be good for them. Kids with handicaps can learn from some of the things we do so we try to make sure that all kids are included in all the activities.”

There were some small differences among the young people based on gender and location about whether the program was ‘mainly for young people with problems’. Girls were slightly more likely to say that having programs that target young people with problems was ‘a little important’ and they reported a larger gap between the importance and actual occurrence of this than did boys.

Teachers believed that their programs had included young people with problems to some degree, and that there was a good match with the importance of doing this. Program providers gave the strongest support for the importance of including young people experiencing difficulties at school, although they reported this occurred at a much lower rate than its importance. Generally they did not think it was necessary to target these young people: “We should be saying that all students should feel welcome and not just focus on making sure that this group or that group is involved – but all are welcome.” Nor did they see the program as a way of dealing with young people with problems – one called this using the program as a “dumping ground”. Others saw that there were implications for program staff in including a diversity of young people:

“We want cadets to be for everyone, but there are realities the teachers have to face. One of them is that in order to cater for the diversity of students, some of whom may have learning or physical difficulties, the issue of risk management arises and because we have volunteers we can not often take students because the staff don’t have the required skills.” (Provider)

Recruitment and selection

Over 90% of participants indicated that program involvement was their choice rather than a school requirement. The program was an elective subject on the school timetable, or an extra-curricular activity they did within and/or outside school hours. In most programs it was not difficult to recruit participants, as young people found the program attractive.
Program promotion occurred formally through school announcements and flyers, or informally via word-of-mouth networks. Older young people already in programs talked to younger ones, or younger young people saw the program in action (particularly where some form of uniform distinguished participants), or heard about it from others through school assemblies and displays.

Teachers provided specific information so young people understood the commitment (often for two years but usually at least for one year), whether or not they could pull out, and their options in these circumstances. Sometimes they actively encouraged young people to take up the opportunity to join, though it is not clear on what basis or for whom this encouragement was provided. Most programs in the study had limits to the numbers of young people who could participate, largely because of the number of funded places and occasionally due to class sizes, transport limitations (e.g. how many people could fit on a bus) or the adult-to-student ratios required on excursions. When there were more interested young people than places available, teachers became more involved in selection.

School staff were usually relieved when the match between places and interested young people was close and they did not have to be gatekeepers. When it was necessary to select young people, they developed processes for addressing this: requiring and rating a written expression of interest or keeping a waiting list for vacancies.

In some cases there were difficulties with recruitment and retention due to program timing, requirements for uniforms, or clashes with sporting programs. On the other hand, some young people indicated that they had chosen a program because it was timetabled against unattractive options. Programs targeting older young people competed with an increased focus on academic achievement, particularly in Years 10 and 11.

There were also difficulties in encouraging specific groups of young people – usually the more ‘hard to reach’ young people – to take up programs, even though teachers and providers believed they would benefit from involvement:

“It’s not true that the program caters for all, as we have no Aboriginal kids in the program. It has been promoted to parents, but no-one came. So in theory we are inclusive, but in practice it doesn’t seem to happen.” (Provider)

In the sample of students (both the core sample and those interviewed in groups) there were very few students with disabilities. An exception was one program in which a young person who was legally blind participated fully in all program activities except sports, and specific program measures including peer assistance from other participants were taken to enable this. In another, a student self-identified as being dyslexic and said: “I kept in because I find some of my other lessons hard.”

**Choices made by young people**

The most common reasons given by young people for joining programs were that they would be fun and/or interesting, that they would do new activities, and that they would gain new skills. The difference of the program from regular school activities (see later in this section) was attractive. Where it was an elective subject, it was the “best one to choose”. Some young people thought the program would have a positive effect on their future through gaining certificates, being able to put the experience on their résumé, helping them get jobs, assisting them in deciding on a career direction or getting into the career or area they wanted, but these were less frequently suggested than were the more immediate reasons of enjoyment or of gaining experiences or skills.

Young people said it was important that program descriptions and young people’s expectations matched the reality of what programs did. Where what really happened did not reflect what they were told about programs, young people’s disappointment had a significant negative impact on their views on the programs and on their own outcomes.

**Inclusive and exclusive program approaches**

Despite the strong positive responses of most young people, there were some who expressed dissatisfaction with the activities provided and did not report positive outcomes. The nature of the
program activities excluded them from participation and from achieving success; they reported consistently lower outcomes from programs than did other young people.

How did ongoing program approaches influence issues of inclusion? Young people, teachers and program providers were all asked to respond to various statements about inclusiveness at the end of the second year of the research. Responses from all groups were very similar. They saw program approaches as encouraging inclusion most of the time, though some young people reported personal experiences of exclusion. All groups also agreed that inclusion was highly important: activities should be designed so that everyone could be involved and succeed.

School staff were the most definite about inclusion: it was important that young people were included in all activities regardless of ability, even if that required adjustments to the program. It helped encourage outcomes of teamwork, support and cooperation – “a sense of mateship”. Teachers tried to make young people “feel important and part of the group”.

Young people were quite clear on the implications of exclusion: “If you exclude people they will not be happy and will think they are different”. Young people would “feel left out and upset if they couldn’t do the same as everyone else”. Occasionally young people expressed this as a matter of rights:

“If they are in it they deserve to get what’s being offered, if not included they feel left out and that’s not the name of the game in [the program].”

All groups supported the proposition that ‘everyone’s ideas are heard, whether they are used or not’, saying that this did occur in programs – although young people believed it should happen more than it did.

Young people also saw that competition within the program might serve to create ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in program outcomes and commented on the importance and occurrence of the proposition that ‘the program builds competition between students’. This aspect of inclusion is dealt with later in this section in considering various program elements.

**Theme 2: Learning approaches in youth development programs**

The development and implementation of quality learning approaches is one of the fourteen ‘underpinning principles’ for good practice in youth development (Ausyouth, 2001a).

*Existing skills and capabilities are tried and expanded at a pace appropriate for each individual, whatever their age or abilities, so that the sense of accomplishment can be experienced by all. The pleasure of learning is reinforced and enhanced by experiences and activities that are fun.*

(Ausyouth, 2001a, p.28)

When young people talked about why they chose to join a youth development program, they focused principally on the nature of the activities. As they proceeded through their programs, this remained at the forefront of their comments i.e. they talked of their enjoyment in doing activities, *then* about what they were learning. Young people’s attraction to, engagement in and retention within youth development programs all depended on the nature of the learning approaches in which they engaged.

This section of the report examines what young people said about these learning approaches.

**The importance and occurrence of program elements**

Young people identified seven key program elements: ‘having fun’; ‘doing things that help the community’; ‘hands on learning’; ‘wearing a uniform’; ‘going on camps’; ‘doing things outside the school’; and ‘meeting new people’.

In 2003, young people were asked about the relative importance and occurrence of the seven elements, together with the item ‘the program builds competition between students’. Information on these items was also collected from school and program provider staff. Chart 7 shows a comparison between the eight elements, together with a comparison between the importance and occurrence of each, as reported by the core group of young people.
The order of importance of the elements remained fairly constant over the year, although the importance of ‘doing things outside school’ declined. Two other factors: ‘going on camps’ and ‘doing things that help the community’ occurred substantially less than young people believed they should, but there was a close match between occurrence and importance for most of the other elements.

A program that was effective in achieving positive outcomes for participants was described as one that included learning activities that were fun, involved hands-on learning (often outside the school), encouraged new relationships with people, and over which young people exercised some control or influence. Activities that involved doing things that helped the community, and also activities that involved camps, were important but were under-represented in practice. While wearing uniforms was sometimes a component of learning approaches, this was not regarded as important as others perhaps felt it should be.

The following program elements are discussed in order of their importance to young people (which is not necessarily the same as their frequency of occurrence):

**#1: Having fun**

Program enjoyment or ‘having fun’ emerged most frequently in comments in all interviews, and was ranked first in importance by young people in all the three states, across metropolitan, rural and regional areas, and by both male and female young people.

“Fun - no one would join if it wasn’t fun. That’s the main thing - lots of the activities are hard but you expect that and they are fun. It’s good to do stuff that’s fun with your mates.”

If the youth development program wasn’t ‘fun’, most would not have joined or continued in the programs.

‘Fun’ involves:

- active student choice or decision-making: “It’s stuff you want to learn”;
- working with friends or in teams: “You’d do it together and have more fun – would support each other to do it” – but also meeting new people;
- activities that are hands-on and practical: “We spend a lot of time out in the parks or in the community... That helps make it fun and it helps you learn”; and
• good relationships with the teacher, including a relaxed classroom ethos, and an ability to joke: “teachers and students working together”.

Teachers and providers similarly recognised the importance of enjoyment:

“I’m convinced that kids learn if they enjoy themselves, otherwise they are not as engaged. They need to know there is a reward at the end to celebrate what they do too.” (Teacher)

#2: Hands on learning

Hands on learning was important to all groups. Practical activities were valued by young people, teachers and providers alike:

“The program has a practical focus, which the kids enjoy and respond better to... The boys in particular responded better to the more practical activities.” (Teacher)

These activities distinguished youth development from other school programs, and young people said: “The main difference is the hands on stuff. That’s very different from school” and: “a lot of young people want to get out there and do stuff and test what you do have. At school you can learn about it but you haven’t done anything to put it into action.” This concept of applying and testing theoretical learning in a real situation occurred frequently in student comments.

The expectation of hands-on learning was also significant in influencing young people to join the program and young people felt misled where the activities did not match those stated or implied in the promotional materials.

Young people made a positive link between hands on activities and learning. They said that when you ‘do things’ you “learn better” and you “learn things you need to know.”

“You learn more. You remember better. You take more interest. You don’t get bored like you do in school.”

#3: Doing things outside the school

Field-based activities provided student learning and enjoyment, and distinguished youth development programs from the normal school program.

“We go out into the environment - we learn things while we are in the environment. We don’t just sit at a desk... Learning is fun: it’s not boring.”

School was seen to focus on theory while outside activities enabled young people to apply that theory and to do things that were ‘useful’:

“You actually do things rather than just talk about it. We go out and help the community, not just sit in class and learn about it. You won’t learn properly if you just study about something – you have to go out and do it.”

#4: Doing things that help the community

Community service was at the foundation of the activities in most programs. Although this was a new experience for many young people, it was widely accepted as worthwhile. However young people indicated it happened less frequently than it should.

Community service was both enjoyable, and a positive learning experience that contributed to gains in skills and knowledge as well as to self-esteem, particularly for those who were initially reticent to take on a new and somewhat daunting personal challenge. “It’s not just the community who gets something out of it – we also get a lot out of it.” Other young people linked these service-based opportunities to those involved with ‘meeting new people’, and this has implications of mutual learning from an increased range of contacts.

“We are a part of the community and young people don’t have a lot of say and if we do then it is usually put out as negative, so this rectifies myths about us – it’s going to be our community so we can start looking after it.”

There was a strong difference between the importance that community service was accorded as a program approach by young people and its occurrence within the programs: it was rated fourth in
importance but seventh in occurrence. This difference was consistent across gender, metropolitan and rural/regional locations and the three states.

Teachers similarly rated community work higher in importance than occurrence. They acknowledged that, if the youth development programs were ‘the best they could be’, there was a need to “get out into community more”, believing that there would be important social outcomes:

“It introduces the students to volunteer work that may carry over when they are adults. In other words it may help breed another generation of volunteers. And as a result, more future volunteers, more responsible citizens in the future.”

Providers, by contrast, saw little difference between the importance and occurrence of doing things in the community in these programs.

#5: Meeting new people

Youth development programs provided a setting in which young people could mix with others who are both older and younger, as well as with young people with whom they did not have classes or would not interact during lunch or other social times. This was valued most by the young people themselves but also by teachers and, with some qualification, by the providers.

In addition, young people reported that they met new adults, with skills and experiences from which they could learn:

“You meet lots of new people when you go out into the community.”

Some providers acknowledged that meeting and making new friends happened as part of the programs but was incidental rather than a main focus:

“The only thing that’s not that important is meeting new people. They do that of course but it’s not the main focus of the program. They meet community people when they do community service work and they meet new kids when they join but that just happens.” (Provider)

All groups rated the importance of this item higher than its occurrence.

#6: Going to camps

Most young people mentioned camps in their interviews, indicating they would have liked more or longer camps. Camps were characterised by a range of activities with strong participation in decision making by young people, the opportunity for leadership, being with friends, learning more about each other as people, and different relationships with the teachers. Camps provided a positive learning environment and were, to a large extent, the embodiment of pedagogically sound learning principles that are of fundamental importance to youth development programs. They provided a setting in which skills could be applied and tested.

Young people and teachers reported that camps actually happened far less than did the program providers but there were differing views here.

“They are an opportunity to foster teamwork, to develop leadership, to learn confidence and new skills. So while they are seen as a lot of fun they are also very important to the program.” (Provider)

“Camps are important but they are not central to (us). Their value comes from things like teambuilding. They are valuable in that sense but not just through providing the kids with lots of outdoor activities.” (Provider)

While young people in group interviews endorsed the importance of camps most strongly, some dissenting voices were heard, not because camps were not fun or there were not the personal benefits as claimed, but because they were demanding of time (especially at weekends), were too few or at the wrong time of the year.

#7: Competition

Young people agreed strongly that youth development programs were characterised more by teamwork than by competition between young people. Competition, it was claimed, “is not that important. You get that in school... if you had lots of competition, only the best kids would win.” They
reported that competition occurred a little during their programs, although much more often than its level of importance warranted. In contrast, program provider staff believed competition happened more often in programs and were more in favour of competition than were school staff and young people (though they also still said it occurred more than its importance warranted).

Perspectives on the importance of competition were fairly consistent across location for young people; while males valued competition a little more than did females, they still did not want it to be a strong focus in programs.

Where incidences of competition were reported positively, they referred to competition between teams rather than individuals and placed such approaches in a ‘fun’ setting. If competition was built into what young people did in a fun way, such as through teamwork games, then this was accepted and often referred to as “fun”, “friendly competition” or “creates motivation.” If the sense of competition was with yourself, rather than against other young people, it was suggested this could have positive effects: everyone would “encourage” and “support” a student to do better than they did last time, regardless of how well they were doing compared to the whole group.

“They encouraged each other to complete things. Competition was not a feature - only in a positive way with themselves, which was fine as they wanted to improve.” (Teacher)

Young people saw inter-personal competition as divisive, unproductive and interfering with learning, rather than facilitating it. Young people said that those who did less well were less likely to have a sense of belonging in the group, and hence not achieve positive outcomes:

“It goes against working as a team… We were working together not against each other.”

#8: Wearing a uniform

‘Wearing a uniform’ was less important to all groups than the frequency of its occurrence. Program providers indicated the greatest difference between occurrence and importance. Student responses were consistent across gender and across metropolitan, regional and rural sectors.

While wearing a uniform was very important for some young people, most saw them as being related primarily to practical issues such as safety and wear-and-tear, rather than having value per se. “It’s not what you look like – it’s what you do.”

While uniforms were criticised as uncomfortable or too hot and so on, most of the criticism was related to peer attitudes and with wearing the uniform around the school. Uniforms sometimes had considerable initial appeal for younger participants seeking to join a particular unit, but this diminished over time.

Teachers and providers identified positives and problems with uniforms. They provided an important brand, but also diverted funds needed for camps and other activities.

“You are forced to spend almost 100% of your budget for the older kids on dress, so that’s money that can’t be spent on other things” (Teacher)

Comparisons with other educational experiences

In theory, all effective classrooms are the embodiment of these quality learning approaches. Do youth development programs replicate or extend other classroom experiences? Do they complement schools’ programs and match their overall ethos and values?

This was not a view supported by the young people in this study. In 2003, almost all young people reported that their youth development programs were markedly different from other school work and that it was this difference, amongst other things, that attracted them to the programs. Many went beyond this position to claim that this not only influenced their decision to continue in the program but that these different elements enhanced the learning that took place. One said: “if we did things in school like we do in cadets we would probably learn more.”

The main contrasts between these programs and other school practices were around:

- **Choice** both to join the program and within programs:

  “In schools most things are compulsory – in cadets there is a great deal of choice. They make an active choice and I think that is the success of the program.” (Provider)
• **Participation** in decision-making: “you get more involved in deciding things and running them than you do at school.”

• **Hands-on and practical activities** that moved beyond theory and sit-down activities, taking young people into environments beyond school to learn about areas they found interesting and wanted to know more about. This involved a more meaningful connection to everyday realities, and connection with and contribution to the community.

• **Comprehensive or holistic programs** that offered more options and a greater range of skills than other school or community alternatives; this was also linked to availability of program funding. Teachers highlighted the extent and diversity of activities as contrasts between youth development programs and other options:

> “It means I am doing something different [that] I normally couldn’t do in a classroom and I have money to facilitate this.” (Teacher)

• **Real challenges**: youth development programs provided more opportunities for learning about project management and meeting real challenges: “In school it’s pretty boring because most of the time we don’t have a challenge.”

• **Relationships**: There were improved teacher-student relationship in youth development programs and this often differed markedly from that in the ‘normal’ classroom. A teacher reported that “the relationship you build with the kids... have allowed us to become more at their level - it is more of a peer relationship that we have... I appreciate this aspect developing; you get to see the kids in a different light.”

These state-sponsored youth development programs sat alongside a range of other school- and community-based ‘development’ options. Some young people talked about leaving their youth development program in order to take these up. In other cases, such as with the Victorian Certificate for Applied Learning (VCAL), the youth development programs were establishing new relationships with these options.

However, young people identified few other options that provided similar experiences or outcomes to youth development programs. Some mentioned regular school programs such as other school subjects like outdoor or physical education, school or community sport, school camps, Student Representative Councils or drama and less frequently, community or volunteer groups, such as Scouts, Police Cadets, Country Fire Service Cadets, State Emergency Service Cadets or Surf Life Saving. Some young people commented that they did not know of any programs that they considered an alternative to the youth development program.

Most school staff were similarly unaware of or unsure about the availability of alternative programs that were similar in style, length and potential benefits to their state-sponsored youth development programs. Some named alternative service providers for youth development programs, personal development programs, short-term health promotion programs, the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, community youth groups, joint programs with VET for senior students, subject options such as outdoor education or broad systemic options such as VCAL and SACE.

**Theme 3: Participation in program decision-making**

‘Positive youth development’ seeks to empower young people as “contributors to their communities now and as shapers of their own future” (Ausyouth, 2002b: p.1). The international literature, and the work of Ausyouth in Australia, has particularly highlighted how youth participation in decision-making is both an outcome and an important learning process of youth development programs:

> Participation in decision-making can extend opportunities for building teamwork and leadership skills, strengthening self-confidence and inspiring [young people] to make further contributions to their communities. Willingness to be involved in decision-making processes provides a basis for contributing to active citizenship and participation in political processes. Young people learn to advocate for themselves and on behalf of others. (Ausyouth, 2003, p.29)

In this research, ‘youth participation’ meant more than just young people turning up and/or taking part in activities. It meant that young people were actively involved in making key decisions about the program, and about what and how they did things within the program. If
positive youth participation occurred, then everyone involved in the program recognised that young people had:

- valuable and legitimate ideas to share,
- expertise about what works for them as young people, and
- the capacity to make decisions either independently or with appropriate support.

This recognition created opportunities for young people to make decisions and have a real influence on as many aspects of the program as possible. Where this was not or less possible, there were discussions between young people and adults about these limitations, and together they negotiated effective ways of working despite those limitations.

This section describes participation as a program approach, what young people, school and provider staff thought youth participation meant, and the levels of and satisfaction with youth participation reported by research participants. The level of youth participation adopted in program decision-making is then linked to the degree of positive outcomes that participants reported.

Levels of youth participation reported

At each interview, participants were asked to rate the level of youth participation that was occurring in their program, based on the amount of influence and decision-making they had. Initially their open responses were coded as ‘none’, ‘low’, ‘shared’ (with staff) or ‘high’ and later they were specifically asked to choose one of these options.

Young people’s opportunity and capacity to shape program decisions was greater at the end of the program than it was at the start. The average self-rating of participation had increased by the end of the first year (compared with their initial experience), as well as from the beginning to the end of the two-year period. The change is shown graphically by amalgamating the ‘high’ and ‘shared’ responses and comparing these throughout the research with the amalgamated ‘low’ and ‘none’ responses (Chart 8):

**Chart 8: Level of Participation - 2002 – 2003: Accumulated**

The most common level of participation reported by young people throughout and at the end of the program was ‘shared.’ As the programs progressed, there was a swing away from ‘none’/‘low’ to ‘high’ rating and this was reflected in an overall increase in participation scores. At the beginning of the research no young people reported ‘high’ participation while 45% reported it was ‘low’ or ‘none’. Two years later (or one year later for some young people), 20% reported a ‘high’ level of influence and decision-making, while 23% young people believed their participation was ‘low’ or ‘none’.

Girls were generally more positive about their level of participation than boys. Young people in rural and regional schools were also more often positive than those in metropolitan schools. In rural schools, young people talked of different relationships between teachers and young people.

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These were usually smaller schools with smaller cohorts of students; teachers and young people mentioned that they already saw each other informally in various settings in the community and that this relationship enhanced shared decision-making.

However there was some fluctuation throughout the program and Chart 9 shows how an average participation score in each round changed over time for girls and boys:


![Chart 9](image)

This variation was influenced both by events within individual programs, but also by differences in awareness of and commitment to youth participation between state programs. For example, one youth development program was part of a statewide subject where there were some non-negotiable requirements; defence forces programs were hierarchical by design, with authority vested in the officer whether he or she was a teacher, provider representative or senior student.

In some areas, where young people had low initial experiences of participation, there were marked changes across the two years, as young people ‘grew into’ a more participatory approach and realised that there was more opportunity to be actively involved than they initially thought. At some points there were also more opportunities for young people to influence what happened, and at other times they did set or accredited courses where they gained certificates and there was little room for flexibility.

Not only did their experiences differ across a program, but they also varied between young people in any one group, with some feeling as if they had more say than others. This was influenced by how well young people got along with the group in general, or with school and provider staff. It was therefore important to discuss with young people their desired levels of participation to understand how satisfied they were with their youth participation experiences in youth development programs, and to understand the relationship between participation and program outcomes.

**Satisfaction reported with youth participation**

Young people were asked if they were satisfied with the level of youth participation in their program and to indicate if they wanted to have ‘less’ or ‘more’ participation, or if they were happy for it to stay the same. No young person said they wanted less participation; around one quarter wanted more participation and around three quarters were happy if participation stayed the same. There were no significant differences between male and female answers on this question, nor between metropolitan and rural/regional young people.

The main differences depended on how young people rated their current level of participation. A comparison of desired participation with current level of participation is shown in Chart 10:
Almost half the young people who rated their level of participation as ‘low’ or ‘none’ wanted this to increase, while only 12% of young people reporting ‘shared’ participation advocated an increase. However, a larger proportion (20%) of young people already reporting ‘high’ participation were keen to see it increase further. When ‘high’ youth participation did not appear to be a strong option, young people did not expect that it would change and accepted ‘shared’ to ‘low’ participation. In contrast, when ‘high’ participation had been part of the expectation and experience, then young people indicated that they wanted at least ‘shared’ decision-making, but hoped for more – they had learnt what happened when they got this opportunity.

Satisfaction with the level of participation was also strongly linked with young people’s satisfaction with the nature of activities being undertaken. If young people were happy with what they were doing in the program, they usually accepted the decision-making process, even if they rated their influence on the program as ‘low’. Young people explained that this was because staff were already organising activities that they wanted to do.

**Meanings of youth participation**

The extended descriptions of the levels of participation provided by young people provided insight into the links between participation and desired program outcomes.

When youth participation was **low**, young people gave ideas or decided on options provided by the teacher or provider: “The teachers decide most things. They sometimes give us some options and we can decide which of those options we want to do.” Most of the key decisions were already made and young people’s influence was on minor matters: “The teacher runs it but we help plan - like we can choose what we take on camp.” Young people were critical if they felt their participation options were tokenistic.

Most young people saw **shared** decision-making as a dialogue between staff and young people where both had suggestions and they made joint decisions: “The teacher asks us what we want to do. We get a lot of chance to have a say... We have good ideas and we talk about them.”

Shared participation was not about taking over. Young people were invited to give ideas, had them listened to seriously, saw at least some of them happen and were supported by staff in the process.

“I guess we shared the decisions because the teachers have the advice and we have the suggestions. We probably made a few more decisions than they had but you have to have them there to help you out or you won’t know what you are doing.”

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**Chart 10: Desired degree of participation by current level of participation:**

- **Core students at end of 2003**

![Chart showing desired degree of participation by current level of participation](image-url)

- **Level of current participation**
  - High
  - Shared
  - Low/None

- **Desired level of participation**
  - OK with current
  - Want more
High youth participation involved young people taking a lead and being responsible for their choices with the support, guidance and ‘back-up’ of staff: “Teachers have input but give us whatever choices we want. We take responsibility for our own actions. They will be there to assist but you have to do it.” A few were surprised that they had this opportunity: “We are doing things that we have chosen. The teacher is helping us to organise them. I thought the teacher would be more in charge and decide more things, but there’s lots of decision-making for us.”

Occasionally there was some overlap between perceptions of high and shared levels of participation. How young people classified their experiences sometimes depended on their expectations: “Lots (of participation). The group pass on their ideas to the group captains and the captains pass it on to the leaders and the leaders pass it on to the instructor. Everyone has a say like this.” Some saw the opportunity to share ideas as being ‘high participation’ because this approach differed so much from their regular experiences at school, while other young people would not rate these experiences as ‘high’.

School and program provider perspectives on participation

In some programs, ideas of youth participation were central to program intentions: the program was intentionally viewed as a ‘youth participation program’. In others, participation ideas were seen as primarily ‘instrumental’ in achieving other goals. In a few cases, youth participation was not identified as a principle of youth development at all. Though participation has been identified and advocated by Ausyouth (2001a) as a core principle, it is possible that this has not been made explicit in the establishment of and support provided to programs at state and/or organisational levels. No group mentioned any definition or model of participation being provided for a program’s guidance.

Many school staff saw youth participation as a developmental process: “Now they are a more cohesive group so there is more opportunity to do this....” Some young people were aware of their teachers’ intentions: “I think he wants us to learn how to make decisions and how to agree with one another when we don’t have the same ideas.”

School staff also identified youth participation as a means to an end for achieving other learning goals:

“Kids learn to share, to listen to others, to understand that they can’t do everything they want, that everyone is important, that they learn by trying things they might not have wanted to do in the first place, that learning can be fun, that everyone is important and can make a contribution.” (Teacher)

Some program providers were strong advocates of youth participation: “It is how it should be. All good youth programs should run this way, as young people won’t participate in it if they don’t have an active say in the program.” Others hoped but could not guarantee that it happened, even if written policies existed that advocated youth participation: “It’s encouraged by the unit leaders but varies from unit to unit. I’d like to see more involvement, more responsibility for general running of the unit.”

At the other end of the spectrum some acknowledged that the programs they offered had limited ability to incorporate youth participation:

“It’s very hard with our structured program to be (any) other way as it is very specific - a course with defined elements in order to get a qualification. It doesn’t lend itself to a lot of flexibility in that respect. You can change the delivery slightly and get young people more involved by getting them to do little projects.” (Provider)

Practical options for participation

Young people described a complex picture of participation opportunities in youth development programs, and wanted multiple possibilities. They realised that some activities allowed for greater participation than others and that there were some areas where it was not possible for them to have influence.

Participants were asked about the degree to which several participation options (based on the descriptions from participants) occurred in their programs and how important they believed these were:
Chart 11: Importance and occurrence of forms of participation:
core students at end of 2003

These young people said that ‘making decisions with teachers in a shared way’ was the most important option, but that ‘following a set program’ occurred more or equally as often. There was greatest discrepancy between importance and occurrence for the ‘shared’ option, with young people saying that this was much more important than its frequency indicated.

Boys were slightly more interested in having a set program, while girls showed a little more interest in being in charge of deciding what to do. They both valued the opportunity to make decisions with staff in a shared way, with the boys (more than girls) noting that this happened less often than they wished it did.

Making decisions with staff in a shared way was more common for rural young people than for regional and metropolitan young people, and they reported less difference between what happened and how important it was. Metropolitan young people reported the most difference between what occurred and the importance each option was given, closely followed by regional young people.

There was general agreement between groups (students, teachers and provider staff) on the order of the options, though provider staff tended to say all options were important and discriminate between them less than other groups. Differences between the groups appeared in their comparisons between importance and occurrence of these options within their program. ‘Following a set program’ was more important to school and program provider staff, but young people often interpreted this option differently. Young people saw ‘a set program’ as meaning there was pre-planning and certainty, rather than as having all aspects mapped out in terms of content and
process. School and program provider staff appreciated having flexibility in the program content and schedule.

Participation and program outcomes

A consistent and major finding at each stage of this research was that student learning outcomes were closely linked to their program participation.

When the degree of change reported by young people in the nine outcomes areas was analysed by reported level of participation, those young people who reported ‘high’ or ‘shared’ participation also reported greater changes in all areas than did those who reported ‘low’ or ‘no’ participation. The difference between groups increased with time. This is most clearly shown in Chart 12 in comparing the overall average change scores for the two groups of young people at the end of the first and second years of the study:

![Chart 12: Overall Outcomes by Participation Level - 2002 – 2003](chart)

This difference becomes more marked when looking at the nine outcome areas (previously listed) individually. There was a positive difference in all outcome areas but one (community service) in 2002, and all areas in 2003. A high or shared perceived level of participation was consistently and strongly associated with greater perceived outcomes in the areas of (in order of strength of relationship) ‘teamwork’, ‘overall attitudes’, ‘confidence’, and ‘individual responsibility’.

These outcome areas were closely linked to the skills and abilities that young people needed to develop in and through youth participation: they needed to take more responsibility for decision-making, work with their peers to do this, have confidence to speak up for themselves and develop attitudes that help them include and consider everyone’s ideas. It is, however, surprising that different perceptions of participation were least associated with different outcomes in the areas of (in order) ‘community service’ (though this fluctuated), ‘overall knowledge’, ‘leadership’ and ‘overall skills’.

The young people who said they had lesser participation in program decision-making also reported a greater difference between the importance and occurrence of almost all the program elements (such as ‘having fun’, ‘doing things that help the community’, ‘wearing a uniform’ and so on), than did the young people who reported higher participation. Those with lesser participation expressed greater concern that program activities and outcomes didn’t meet their expectations.

Theme 4: Relationships between providers and schools

The youth development programs in this research involved relationships between community-based program providers and schools. The nature of the relationship was closely linked to program operations and thus to outcomes for young people. This section of the report focuses on the nature of this relationship, factors that contributed to its development, and the influence of the relationship on the program’s operation and on the experiences of and outcomes for young people. Most of this information came from interviews with school and program provider staff.
The relationship between school and provider, and the role of the provider, varied significantly between locations and programs. The relationship was primarily influenced by the people involved and their expectations of the program, their knowledge and awareness of youth development and their aims for the young people, but was also affected by state program commitments and requirements. The relationship changed over time, sometimes strengthening, at other times becoming stressed, and on occasions becoming totally broken. Where a consistent structure to the relationship in these programs might have been expected, there was a high level of variation.

*Initiation*

These State Government-sponsored youth development programs worked through existing systems, and responsibility for program initiation at a local level was almost always with schools. Schools initially applied for membership and support, and determined the nature of the provider organisation with whom they would develop a relationship in program delivery. In a few cases, the program application was based on a pre-existing partnership arrangement between a school and a provider, and this provided a strong basis for a continuing partnership in program operation.

The choice of provider by a school was based on consideration of local availability, provider consistency with school values and ethos, accessibility, school knowledge of providers and local networks, teacher interest and sometimes involvement with a provider, and the fit of the provider activities with the curriculum requirements of the school program.

*Personnel*

In some cases the primary contact between the school and the provider was with a staff person who was connected to the state office or had responsibility for youth development programs in the organisation. In other cases it was with a local person, staff or volunteer with whom the school had contact. The capacity of the provider organisation to be involved also varied widely, with some having highly developed and formalised programs, others relying on local volunteer staff supported by central curriculum materials, and some able to give only limited local support and access to facilities.

Some provider organisations coordinated their youth development programs from a central location (a state or head office). Most had paid staff to support their youth development programs, supplemented with volunteers from either central or local groups. Where providers had paid staff to support programs, several relied solely on the program funding they received from the state government to support this position and to provide infrastructure resources, curriculum material, access to organisational equipment, networks, buildings/locations and management support. Other programs utilised funding that was allocated within their organisations for their broader cadet programs in addition to state funding.

In some situations local volunteers provided activities to a school-based youth development program. There were frustrations with this arrangement: when schools changed class arrangements at short notice and volunteers had taken time out from their regular jobs to be available; or when arrangements to work within school programs were broken with little warning by emergency calls on volunteers’ time. There were also frustrations when providers were not familiar with learning approaches for young people, or when the provider was not able to ensure consistency of personnel. These frustrations sometimes resulted in the role of the provider being limited to simply enabling access to existing services.

These difficulties were sometimes mirrored within schools with staff changes. Effective program operations were built around teachers who were closely involved with provider organisations. If (or when) these teachers moved from the school, programs were maintained by shifting control totally to the provider organisation (with the school’s role solely being recruitment of young people, or provision of premises), or by recruiting a new teacher with an interest in the area. Where programs operated outside school hours and timetables, staff changes implied major readjustments to the organisation of programs. On the other hand, where a youth development program was built into a school’s organisational structures, it was more likely to ensure program continuity with allocation of a ‘replacement teacher’ even if that person initially only carried out a limited organisational role or maintained liaison with the provider.
The perspectives provided by various teachers and provider personnel in this study were often quite different and these differences provided useful insights into program planning and delivery. However, these responses were also affected by a lack of continuity. In many cases, the availability of the provider contact changed during the research.

**Nature of the relationship**

Program providers and teachers noted the importance of getting the ‘fit’ between program provider and school right. They pointed to the need for an agreed understanding about youth development principles and practice:

“You need both the teachers and the program providers to know what youth development is and particularly … willing to work with [each other] and be flexible about their program to match the needs and abilities of the students.” (Teacher)

The relationship involved negotiation between organisations, understanding of the different agendas of providers and schools, and mutual recognition of the abilities and/or needs of the young people.

While the provider organisation provided support in the delivery of the program, there was general recognition that much depended on the school’s approach. Because programs were initiated within or by schools, and generally delivered with some relationship to the school curriculum, and because the recruitment of young people largely happened through schools, there was the acknowledgment that, ultimately: “a lot depends on the skill and enthusiasm of the teacher” and that “an enthusiastic and supportive principal generally means a good cadet program”.

After two years’ observation of program operations, programs were described in terms of the ‘locus of control’ between schools and program providers. Of the 18 schools in the sample:

- Three programs (17%) were run totally by schools, with little or no provider involvement;
- Nine programs (50%) were run largely by schools, with some provider input and involvement;
- Four programs (22%) were run as partnerships between schools and providers;
- No programs were largely run by providers, but with some school involvement; and
- Two programs (11%) were totally run by providers, with little or no school involvement.

These descriptions varied somewhat during the life of the program – the nature of the relationship was fluid and could be (and was) re-visited and re-structured. However, it should be noted that less than a quarter of the programs operated as ‘true partnerships’, while half involved some form of ‘partial partnership’ in which one organisation dominated program decision-making.

The relationship was constrained by and also influenced other organisational and structural elements of the programs such as whether programs operated within or outside school hours, limitations on ages or age groupings, and state program requirements.

The nature of the commitments to the relationships was also observed to change with the increased experience of individuals and groups in operating the programs. In some cases, schools and providers needed time to explore and grow into more effective partnership arrangements. On the other hand, where practical barriers to effective partnerships were not addressed (e.g. in maintaining voluntary community commitments) or as they become more familiar with the knowledge and skills involved, schools were seen to increasingly ‘take over’ program provider roles.

**Roles of school and provider within the relationship**

In most cases, the operation of programs depended heavily on schools’ input. Schools structured the program as a subject or as a co-curricular activity and allocated staff to the program as part of their allotment or as extra duties. That staff member designed and delivered the curriculum and organised the activities, including coordinating with the provider. The ongoing imperatives and requirements of schools’ organisational structures (including their timetables) maintained program momentum: if a youth development program was scheduled as a class, it could not decide not to meet on one particular week. Similarly, because it was part of the school, the program was subject to disruption arising from excursions, whole-school events, holidays and so on.
The role of the program provider varied between and within programs. It could involve:

- **strong involvement**: a hands-on facilitator, directly in activities with young people or with formal instruction. This was particularly valuable in outdoor activities, where the program provider enabled access to equipment, facilities, locations and training;
- **supportive involvement**: offering consultation support, trouble-shooting and advice. This also included mentoring or training of school staff, and collaboration on local curriculum development;
- **distant involvement**: provision of a curriculum document, or coordination of the program’s access to available resources. Where curriculum resources were not designed specifically for the program, both program and school staff were critical of their theoretical nature; however, comprehensive and flexible guides were appreciated; or
- **nominal involvement**: provision of ‘badging’ but limited personal contact. In such cases, schools and teachers drew on their resources to continue the programs.

Further information is provided about aspects of these roles in the Technical Report.

### Managing a relationship for positive outcomes

Positive outcomes for young people were more likely when programs established and maintained a strong relationship between the provider personnel and the teacher, and between the provider personnel and the young people. In these cases a partnership had developed over time and a sense of mutual respect and trust existed. Shared understandings about program intentions and the desired student profile, clarity of roles and purpose, and consistency of personnel and approaches were central to these partnerships.

The nature of the provider-school relationship also affected the degree and importance of youth participation facilitated within the program. In some programs, the provider and school staff indicated that they had talked about their learning approaches, including how they would encourage and support youth participation. Where this had occurred, or the school and provider actively planned for the participation of the young people, then participation and associated outcomes were stronger.

Although many programs reported that very positive relationships developed, there were exceptions. Concerns were expressed about inappropriate or badly-run activities, rigidity in programs, non-negotiable requirements, changes to personnel, lack of information or commitment, provision of less time than expected, and theoretical or demanding approaches. “We felt like we always had to ask for things or jump through their hoops – it was never a partnership.” (Teacher)

When there was a breakdown of relationships, some schools said: “we are paying for it and not getting what we paid for”, rather than seeing such issues as joint responsibilities to be solved by partners. In these situations, young people were less likely to report positive outcomes for themselves.

### Key ideas:

- Outcomes were shaped by the approaches that youth development programs adopted or developed. Four areas emerged as significant: recruitment and inclusion; learning approaches including community involvement; youth participation in program decision-making; and relationships between community-based program providers and schools.

### Selection and Inclusion

- **Anyone** should be able to join a youth development program; on the whole, this occurred. While programs could provide opportunities for young people who were not succeeding in school, programs should not be seen as being solely for one group of young people.
- The involvement of and achievement of success by all young people in program activities was highly important, and happening most of the time.
- Over 90% of young people chose to be in their program. They strongly endorsed the concept of choice of involvement.
Youth development programs were an attractive option within the school curriculum, and young people were positive about joining those programs. They chose to join because they expected activities to be fun and/or interesting, involve experiential learning outside school, provide new skills, and enable them to be with friends or make new friends. It was important that expectations and program descriptions matched the reality of what programs did.

**Learning approaches**

- ‘Having fun’, ‘hands-on learning’, ‘doing things that help the community’, ‘meeting new people’, and ‘doing things outside the school’ were all important aspects of learning approaches that helped young people achieve outcomes. ‘Having fun’ was particularly important.
- Hands-on and practical field-based activities distinguished youth development programs from the normal school program and provided a key to student learning and enjoyment. Most significantly, young people saw a strong link between doing things outside the school and learning.
- Helping the community was important to young people but it occurred far less often than they would like. The most common description they gave of community was something that they ‘served’ rather than something they ‘belonged to’ or could influence.
- Camps were important to most young people providing a positive and pedagogically sound learning environment.
- Youth development programs were characterised more by teamwork than by competition between young people. However competition was seen to occur more during programs than its level of importance warranted. Under certain circumstances, competition that was ‘fun’ and ‘friendly’ was seen to have a useful place within activities provided it was not the central focus.
- While program identification through uniforms was important to the providers, their value was questioned by young people, unless they were linked practically to the nature of the activities. Wearing uniforms was seen to occur more frequently than its importance warranted.

**Comparisons with other education experiences**

- The teaching and learning approaches in youth development programs were substantially different from other school programs in areas of choice, diverse ‘hands on’ and ‘practical’ activities, meaningful connection to everyday realities and opportunities for active youth participation. These differences attracted young people to the programs, influenced decisions to continue in programs and enhanced learning.

**Participation**

- Active youth participation in program decision-making defined youth development programs for many young people and contrasted markedly with school experiences, where they had limited opportunities to have a voice, or to have their ideas listened to and taken seriously.
- Most young people reported experiencing shared decision making and favoured “making decisions with the teachers in a shared way.” For all groups, this also happened less often than they wished.
- No young person wanted less participation; around a quarter of the sample wanted more participation and around three quarters were happy if it stayed the same. Satisfaction of young people with the level of participation was strongly linked with their satisfaction with the nature of activities being undertaken.
- Young people who indicated high or shared participation, also consistently rated their overall outcome changes as greater than those who indicated low or no participation. Young people who said they had lesser participation in program decision-making also reported a greater difference between the importance and occurrence of almost all program elements, than did the young people who reported higher participation.

**Relationships**

- Half of the programs in this study were run mainly by schools, with some provider input and involvement. Less than a quarter of the programs involved a balanced partnership between schools and providers. Responsibility for program initiation at a local level was almost always with the school.
- Schools valued the skills and experience contributed by provider personnel in hands on and outdoor activities, but required consistent personnel who were well informed about the program and their role, familiar with the learning approaches used and had access to the resources and support required to deliver on the provider organisation’s commitments.
Discussion, Implications and Directions

This final section of the Report discusses the research findings. It draws upon the results outlined in earlier sections to direct attention to some strong conclusions and also to implications for programs. The discussion extends upon the study’s findings and raises issues within more general contexts. It is organised under the previously noted six themes of ‘Outcomes’, ‘Community connections’, ‘Inclusion’, ‘Learning approaches’, ‘Participation’, and ‘School-provider relationships’.

Questions that arise from this discussion are presented as questions (shown as boxed text) that are intended to stimulate further reflection and discussion within programs at all levels and to link the study results to future directions. (These were initially included in the Discussion Papers that were circulated to programs participating in this study.)

Finally, some specific needs and future directions that arise from the research are identified and presented for consideration by local programs, State Programs and the Australian Government. These directions propose responses to some of the questions asked in this section of the Report.

Discussion of themes

Theme 1: Outcomes

The central focus of this research was on the achievement of outcomes for young people because of their involvement in youth development programs. The success of youth development programs is based not just on ‘what the young people do’ but on ‘what they gain’.

There were positive outcomes noted in all the nine identified areas (grouped as ‘knowledge and skills’, ‘personal and social development’ and ‘connection to community’). The most highly valued outcomes were those of increased personal confidence and inter-personal skills (such as teamwork), as well as a range of specific and practical skills.

The application of the knowledge, skills and attitudes developed within these programs can influence on-going learning, and have a broader impact on participants’ lives and on their relationship with other young people. Young people have taken on leadership roles in school and community organisations following their involvement in youth development programs, and this was attributed to the acquisition of new skills and opportunities to apply them in different situations.

However, achievement of these outcomes was not universal amongst program participants: not all young people saw that they had gained from their involvement. If programs are to provide quality outcomes for all young people, it is imperative that schools, providers and communities are clear about and agree on the nature of these outcomes, articulate them through their program objectives, and then design activities to achieve them.

The important implications of this research for schools, program providers and State Programs are:

Specification of outcomes

Young people, teachers, parents and providers all talked very positively about the programs and the outcomes achieved, both for the individuals involved and for the group but very few teachers or providers could clearly specify the nature of desired program outcomes in advance. There appeared to be little documentation of program aims and objectives. “We were so busy setting the program up and working with the provider to work out what was possible, that documentation wasn’t a priority.” (Teacher)

Some, in fact, resisted documentation:
“Time spent documenting what is done – to me as a volunteer it is less important than doing the activities. Pay me or give me time and I will be more inclined to do so. Let us get on with what we do – less time documenting!” (Provider)

This can mean that the planning of specific activities to achieve outcomes is compromised, and that programs find it difficult to assess and report against aims and objectives. Most young people joined programs with a very limited view of what the program objectives were, what they would do, what they could expect in terms of learning outcomes and how these would be assessed and recognised. A dialogue between a teacher and a student emphasised the importance of doing this:

“This is important that you also give this information on the program aims and objectives and how it will be assessed, to the students.” (Teacher) “…Yea, then you know ahead what you were going to do, the assessment and the whole thing in the course.” (Student) “…I think it gives the subject more credibility – just like other subjects.” (Teacher)

Some programs demonstrated greater capacity in this regard. The degree of specification and documentation of objectives can depend on the nature of the link between the youth development program and the school curriculum, and whether there is an expectation, encouragement or requirement to develop curriculum objectives in these terms.

“We had our program with a year 10 and 11 group, so when you bring a program into Year 11, it becomes compulsory to document outcomes because we created an alignment with the SACE. We have started this at year 10 so that they get a SACE point for that year’s work, which means that there is formal documentation by both students and teachers.” (Teacher)

“We need to be very clear about what the program is about and document it – and we also had activ8 coming in to do a moderation and had to report to them.” (Teacher)

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<tr>
<td>What assistance and support do schools and providers need with developing formal statements of objectives and of intended outcomes? How could this occur? Who should be responsible for this support?</td>
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<td>How can programs assist young people to develop a clear picture of what they will do in and gain from programs?</td>
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Program promotion and selection

Even when they were unclear about program intentions or activities, most young people had clear ideas about why they wanted to join youth development programs. This was frequently influenced by what they were told the program was about by school and program staff, as well as by their peers who had previously been or were currently involved. Most frequently, they highlighted enjoyment and the nature of hands-on and practical activities rather than longer-term goals.

On the other hand, schools encouraged young people to join because they said these programs had good employment outcomes: the programs were described as providing certificates, skills and knowledge that teachers saw as valuable to prospective employers. While some teachers said that changing attitudes and behaviour or doing community service were part of their school’s motivation for getting involved in youth development programs (although these intentions were not documented), opportunities for their development were not as strongly promoted or made explicit in schools.

When there was not a match between how staff ‘marketed’ the program and what took place once they became involved, understandably, young people were disappointed. This is an issue both of integrity and of recognising what it is that young people value in these programs.

Schools do have objectives for these programs that are not made clear or explicit in program promotion. The design and promotion of youth development programs should take account of different outcomes appreciated by young people, including personal
development, as well as the development of skills and community service. The ‘sell’ messages used by schools and providers will need to focus on what the young people themselves value: hands-on activities, fun, a broad range of activities, opportunities to develop new relationships and team skills. Young people understood and valued these different outcomes, and eventually saw them as contributing to their future involvement in workplaces and communities.

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<td>How can the personal and social development aspects be better promoted i.e. be given higher profile or more emphasis in program materials?</td>
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<td>What program processes need to be established to assist young people to understand and make connections between the various intended outcomes of programs?</td>
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Teaching to achieve outcomes

Different approaches to teaching are needed if youth development programs are to achieve their aims and purposes. Young people need to be engaged and understand what, how and why they are doing things.

Young people overwhelmingly valued hands-on learning activities, ‘having fun’ and participating in a range of camps and practical activities. These strategies were seen to lead to changes that assisted young people in their development as individuals, as a group, and throughout their education and beyond. They need to be intentional components of a program that are directed to achievement of outcomes.

Young people and teachers commented on the practices that should mark effective achievement of these outcomes:

“Teachers would spend more time coordinating and the student leaders taking more responsibility.” (Teacher)

Yet, in one example, leadership opportunities were spoken about and provided early in the second year of a program, but specific teaching activities were not sustained. If young people didn’t see that leadership opportunities were maintained, it was not surprising that they also indicated decreased outcomes in this area. Some teachers also identified this as an area in which they needed more program support:

“We want to know what we can do to structure workshops so that leadership is strengthened, as we are concerned that this did not come up strongly enough in the outcomes of this research.” (Teachers)

Similarly, if ‘leadership’, ‘teamwork’ and ‘self-reliance’ are desired objectives, then specific teaching and learning strategies and opportunities should be structured into programs to achieve these.

The specification of needs, aims and objectives would assist schools to plan their teaching and learning so that different approaches occurred and quality outcomes were achieved.

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<td>How do programs develop teaching approaches to ensure achievement of positive outcomes?</td>
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<td>What assistance do schools and providers need in developing appropriate teaching approaches? How could this occur? Who should be responsible for this?</td>
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Active participation in decision-making and outcomes

Some youth development programs intentionally provided opportunities for young people to participate in program decision-making as a core principle of their approach. As young people took increasing responsibility for making decisions about what they did and why, stronger links were created between program goals and individual participant goals. By adopting program processes that involved young people and other key people in decision-making, there was also greater awareness and understanding of ‘what happens’ and ‘why’.
Teachers, school administrators and provider staff and volunteers in other programs indicated that the participation of young people in decision-making was not always one of their central program strategies or objectives, or was a strategy adopted towards the achievement of other outcomes.

The research data from this study strongly suggested a link between young people’s outcomes and their program participation. Those young people who indicated high or shared participation, also consistently rated their overall outcome changes as greater in all interview rounds. This is consistent with other recent research. Greater attention should be paid within programs to the promotion and support of active participation in decision-making, both as an outcome in its own right, and as an approach to learning that enables other outcomes to be achieved.

**It is asked:**
*How can schools and providers be supported to strengthen links between program operation and decision-making – particularly for young people – and to establish clearer, explicit and shared goals?*

### Determining achievement of outcomes

Although both school and program provider staff identified achievement of outcomes and benefits for young people, this was mostly at an anecdotal level; very few had formal processes for tracking and recording these at an individual or group level.

> “We don’t do any formal reporting and the reporting we have to do is pretty bland. I wouldn’t want it to be too formal and time consuming, but it would be easy to simplify it and make it a tick the box format and I’m sure it would be worthwhile.” (Teacher)

The idea of schools measuring achievement of outcomes for young people and for the school was generally a daunting one for most staff. They did not see themselves as sufficiently resourced with knowledge, skills, time or funds to do this in an effective way. Faced with time pressures and a lack of tools, the only available and viable option was to identify and sometimes (but not always) document observations of and stories about particular young people. Many identified this as an area in which they required program support.

> “Having a tool to use that the students could complete at the beginning and end – that would be nice for students to have to see their change, as well as for the teachers. Kids may see it as more worthwhile if there was some physical outcome they can see on the piece of paper.” (Teacher)

This research may assist overall documentation within the sampled schools by defining a focus on possible outcomes. However, teachers and program providers will need further assistance in the development of appropriate ways to determine and record achievement of outcomes.

**It is asked:**
*How do programs currently measure the achievement of outcomes and benefits for young people, providers and schools?*

*What assistance and support do schools and providers need with measuring outcomes? How could this occur? Who should provide this assistance?*

### Theme 2: Community connections

Young people exist within many different communities: geographic communities (local or broader), social communities, and communities of intent. Strengthening the relationships between young people and their communities is seen as fundamental to good practice in youth development. Ausyouth’s discussion document, *Good Practice in Youth Development*, describes these relationships as symbiotic. Four of the fourteen underpinning principles for good practice focus on young people’s relationships with communities:
• respecting community voice and identity;
• encouraging communities to value and engage young people;
• providing opportunities for service to the community that are meaningful for both the young people and the community; and
• maximising formal and community recognition of learning outcomes. (Ausyouth 2001a, p.7)

The emphasis for young people’s connections with communities is not simply on what young people can do for communities. It also includes acknowledging young people as valuable members of communities. Young people are to be welcomed, directly considered and actively involved in community activities, development and decision-making.

Active citizenship through participation in community life gives young people a recognized presence in the community, enabling young people to take up their rightful place as citizens. Young people’s ability to influence and take some control over the future will assist in their vision for a positive future. Having a sense of belonging and being part of a community that cares about young people is fundamental to this. (Ausyouth, 2003, p.23)

Good community-based practice in youth development can lead to the following three broad areas of community-linked outcomes:

First, community linkages have benefits for young people’s skill development:

• They provide young people with opportunities and experiences that develop knowledge and skills from sources other than the classroom.
• They provide young people with opportunities to test their own knowledge and skills in real-life situations.

Secondly, community linkages have benefits for young people’s personal, social and civic development:

• They develop young people’s awareness of individual and community responsibility and the benefits to be derived from voluntary action.
• They provide young people with opportunities and experiences that strengthen and enhance their connection with their communities.
• They give young people a stake in their communities as well as fostering an optimistic outlook for their futures.

Thirdly, community linkages have benefits for the development of inclusive communities:

• They provide opportunities for young people and adults to develop positive relationships that might not otherwise exist, as they get to know, respect and learn from each other through their common interest.
• They provide community recognition of young people as valued contributors in and to their communities, and encourage active citizenship and social inclusion.
• They support the engagement of young people in their communities as a vital and necessary condition for the ongoing evolution and advancement of those communities.

The existence of community connections also influenced the nature of the learning processes adopted within programs. On one level they enriched program processes through the provision of human and other resources; on another level, they also challenged processes to move away from familiar or traditional patterns and orientations to learning. In addition, they had practical implications as these activities created issues about travel, supervision and coordination.

The community-related activities in which young people were engaged were most often related to community service rather than to community change or community development. This was consistent, to a degree, with the underpinning principles identified in the Ausyouth Good Practice discussion document in making provision for opportunities for service to the community that are meaningful for both the young people and the community (Ausyouth, 2001a, p.7).
While some variation between the different programs was to be expected, this research confirmed that most young people saw this engagement with the community as an important outcome. Community linkages - through location, involvement and service - provide ideal opportunities for learning. Such linkages also have profound implications for the nature of the relationships between schools and program providers in both planning and delivering activities.

The following issues are presented for further consideration and discussion by and within programs:

**Need for planning around community connections:**

Extended opportunities for young people to interact with their communities are most likely to build positive outcomes such as enhanced connection with communities, awareness of individual and community responsibilities, development of social inclusion and of positive relationships, respect, and a willingness to learn from each other. However, if productive community connections are to occur, these must be planned for within program objectives and strategies. One cannot simply ‘hope’ that activities will produce these desired outcomes: there must be ample opportunities built into programs for community connections to occur if these important outcomes are to be achieved.

The occurrence of community service through these programs did not match the level of importance it was accorded by young people and their teachers. More time should be devoted to developing community connections, including community service, within the programs within their financial, practical and time constraints. Young people would welcome this.

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<td>To what extent should programs focus on community connections, including community service?</td>
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<td>Are the programs’ community service activities consistent with the achievement of positive outcomes?</td>
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<td>What support do programs need in planning for appropriate community connections?</td>
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**Community partnerships:**

Although the program activities described by young people were taking place in the community and involved, to some extent, activities taken with community groups, young people saw themselves primarily as doing things for those communities. For teachers and providers however, the partnership element of community connections – in which young people work alongside others to explore, define, shape and change their community - was of paramount importance.

The importance of doing things with the community needs to be made more explicit to young people, but in a way that also includes young people’s commitment to service and their sense of doing things for the community.

One school suggested: “If I were to do this program again, I would be getting in contact with the local government to let them know there is a group of students doing this program and find out what groups or projects are available in our area so that we can consider working with them. This would make it more meaningful and worthwhile for the students.”

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<td>What are the most effective ways of developing in young people a sense of ‘partnership’ with their ‘community’?</td>
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There will be substantial problems if ‘learning about the community’ is approached as a more theoretical activity within youth development programs. Many young people saw classroom based activities as contrary to their expectations when they joined and, indeed,

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7 For a contrasting example, see here the work of Student Action Teams (Holdsworth et al, 2001, 2003) in which young people undertake research and action initiatives to address community issues that are important to them and others.
contrary to some of the programs’ promitional material. They valued doing things outside
the classroom and the school and said their learning was enhanced when this occurred; it
was a feature that differentiated youth development programs from other school programs.
For ‘learning about the community’ to be important and for young people to be engaged
through this learning, it needs to be experiential and purposeful learning carried out in the
community. Such learning should not be ‘incidental’ and unacknowledged if it is an
important and intended outcome of programs.

**It is asked:**

How do young people most effectively learn about their communities through these programs?

Youth development programs established a foundation for some young people that could
lead to future involvement as community volunteers. While teachers and providers were
aware of this potential, it was not clear that the young people were aware of the importance
of volunteers in their community. While they saw doing things ‘for the community’ as
important, and provided numerous examples of where this occurred, these were seen as
occasional and fragmented service activities (done from ‘outside’ those communities),
isolated from an understanding of ongoing roles that constituted those communities.

**It is asked:**

How can programs develop young people’s understanding and appreciation of the importance of
community volunteers more effectively?

**Young people: Part of community?**

Many of the young people in this study do not see themselves as full members of the
communities with which they work in the programs. Similar results have been noted in
various studies around ‘social capital’ (e.g. Putnam, 2000, 2001; Irby et al., 1998; IYF, 2001).
Programs with an emphasis on ‘community service’ can reinforce such a relationship if
they place young people outside those communities, serving them, but not being involved
in their creation or development.

Ensuring that community service ‘is meaningful to young people’ can transform that
relationship, as young people move into a more active participatory role around questions
of what service is important, why it is carried out, and what ends may be achieved. A
teacher and a student from one program discussed issues related to this:

Teacher: “You need to make sure you find an appropriate community group to do this
with if you want it to work.”

Student: “And young people need to pick it so they really want to participate.”

Programs could also consider other models of community action (e.g. ruMaD?, 2004;
Holdsworth et al., 2001, 2003), in which ideas of community are more contentious, and in
which young people are encouraged to investigate, propose and act around the nature of
the community they desire. These unite ideas of learning about (and from) the community,
as well as working and learning with community groups. They also unite program ideas of
youth participation (extending this meaning from program decision-making to community
decision-making) with community connections.

**It is asked:**

How do programs enable young people to see themselves and be seen by others as part of and actors
within uncertain and developing communities?

**Theme 3: Inclusion**

Creating a sense of belonging is of fundamental importance for young people. In recognising that
anyone has a right to be involved, inclusion is a value that young people can incorporate into their
everyday current and future dealings with the diverse range of people they meet.
All participants in this research strongly agreed that youth development programs should be inclusive of all young people. This view shapes approaches to program choice, selection, promotion and processes. These processes should be chosen to enable all young people to experience success in and positive outcomes from these programs. While largely rejecting the idea that programs should be specifically targeted to young people ‘with problems’ i.e. those currently not experiencing success within schools, there was also a strong commitment to the inclusion of such young people within these programs.

A commitment to inclusion has implications for program outcomes and program processes.

Program outcomes:
The development of a sense of inclusion and belonging among young people is directly linked to the achievement of desired outcomes of youth development programs, such as strengthening teamwork, building confidence to aspire to personal goals, fostering leadership and developing supportive and positive attitudes to others. One teacher said:

“People can’t develop leadership if they can’t empathise with others. They need to understand that every group needs different people who take different roles and the skills that go with them, whether they are quiet, loud, a leader or an organiser.”  (Teacher)

Young people said that they would not gain maximum skills and knowledge if programs weren’t inclusive because “if you didn’t [include everyone and work together] you wouldn’t learn as much.”

Program processes:
The inclusion of all participants in program decision-making was one important indicator of overall inclusive practices: “People had their say, everyone was included in the activity if it was their choice.”

When this was emphasised and extended throughout the program, rather than just occurring at the beginning, young people were more likely to comment that ‘everyone’s ideas were heard’, and that people came to understand each other better and develop their cooperation and teamwork. They were also more likely to advocate that other young people get involved in youth development programs.

Schools and providers should share perspectives on inclusion in program selection and operation. When providers and schools had an agreed and mutual approach to making programs open to anyone, while also being conscious of including young people experiencing learning or behavioural problems, programs operated consistently and smoothly. However, when either providers or schools were more inflexible about selection, about program content and specific activities, or made unilateral assumptions about who these programs were for, this created program tensions and worked against the achievement of quality outcomes for all young people.

The following are implications of this research for schools, program providers and State Programs in the area of inclusion.

Program promotion and selection
There are links between the ways in which programs are promoted and who then joins programs. When the promotion highlights ideas like: ‘if you aren’t doing well in your classes …‘ or ‘if you enjoy practical activities more than theory …‘ or ‘if you want to spend more time doing what you’re good at …‘, these all send different messages about who should consider, apply for and be selected for programs. Unless schools and providers are clear about their intentions to gain a mix of young people and examine their practices in order to achieve this, programs can easily either exclude those already marginalised in schools (who perhaps lack confidence to join) or, on the other hand, become stigmatised and marginalised programs that concentrate failure experiences for young people.

It is asked:
Are schools clear about their selection intentions? How do school encourage ‘marginalised’ young people to join programs? What structural or personal barriers are placed on in the way of them joining?
Implications and Recommendations

**Competition**

While competition can motivate, challenge and inspire some young people, it can also alienate, deter and marginalise others. While school staff emphasised that youth development programs were not about competition, and preferred to use other descriptions, young people did not totally oppose competition. They were clear that under certain circumstances competition had a useful place within programs, provided it was not the central focus. They rejected examples where positive outcomes and continued successful involvement were dependent on how well you performed at certain activities, and where young people were in direct competition with each other. They believed that such interpersonal competition already occurred in schools, with personal ability determining what subjects one did, and where grading often occurred in a competitive atmosphere, particularly in the senior school years. Youth development programs were clearly seen as ‘different’ in this regard and hence were ‘inclusive’ rather than ‘exclusive’ by intention.

When linked to learning approaches that young people valued (such as activities being fun and hands-on), then ‘friendly competition’ could motivate young people, and support them to encourage each other as individuals and/or team members to achieve the goals they had set. Rather than avoid competition altogether, this approach contributed to the desired outcomes of youth development programs, such as strengthening teamwork, building confidence to aspire to personal goals, and developing supportive and positive attitudes to others. Ausyouth (2003: p.15) noted that:

>A positive environment implies a focus on contribution and not on winning. For example, is a selective approach adopted which considers the extent to which activities for young people are organised as individual or team competitions?

**Theme 4: Learning approaches**

While particular outcomes were promoted by programs (access to employment, certification, skill training), it was clear from the start of this research that young people identified the experiential nature of the programs and the enjoyment or ‘fun’ derived from those experiences as most important in their decisions to join, and in their hopes and expectations for program involvement. In order to achieve outcomes, and to engage young people, programs need to provide a range of learning approaches and experiences that appeal to young people and that are seen to be purposeful and productive.

Young people link outcomes in skills, self-esteem, leadership and cooperation to specific aspects of program approaches that enable them to develop and test these ways of behaving in real situations e.g. opportunities to work cooperatively as a member of a team, experience leadership and meet challenges.

The development of such approaches should be neither casual (i.e. simply ‘hoped for’) nor of short-term expediency. Approaches need to be carefully planned and structured, with schools and community-based providers working together in order to achieve continued learning through application of skills and attitudes over an extended period. It is through adopting:

>... an integrated way over a sustained period through an experiential approach to learning that the most significant youth development outcomes will be realised. (Auszouth, 2001a, p.10)

The way that a teacher or program provider works with young people is the most significant variable, as it is with any school or community-based program. Teachers and program providers should develop approaches that are valued by young people as leading to quality outcomes, within the framework or guidelines developed and supplied by the respective providers and/or State Programs, and consistent with the overall ethos and learning approach of the school.

The implications of this research for schools, program providers and State Programs include:
Adopting and evaluating quality learning approaches

Quality learning approaches lead to valued outcomes. They are multi-dimensional and include aspects valued by young people: activity based, outside the school, done with friends or enabling them to make new friends and, most importantly, enjoyable or ‘fun’. (Once it ceases to be fun, young people will leave the program or enrol in an alternative elective if permitted and if one is available.) Those involved in organising and delivering the programs need to ensure that as many of these aspects as possible are present. They should monitor programs to check whether the aspects identified by young people as important are present and are perceived as such by the participants. It is therefore important that young people are active participants in evaluating and improving programs.

**It is asked:**

*To what extent is it possible to incorporate the factors seen by young people as important into programs? What attempts are made to regularly monitor levels of student engagement and satisfaction?*

Learning through application in real settings

Quality outcomes are achieved through approaches that both young people and the wider community see as meaningful and purposeful. Provider organisations have strong connections with communities and are thus in a position to provide access to settings through which young people are able to engage in community activities that provide this purpose and meaning. They enable young people to ‘test’ their skills and qualities in real settings.

**It is asked:**

*How can programs work with provider organisations to create opportunities for young people to implement, practise and test their skills in contexts that provide real and purposeful outcomes?*

School ethos and learning approaches

Support from the school, in particular from the administration, does much to foster the health of a youth development program. The key to building this support lies in the choice of a program provider whose approach supports the ethos of the school. Adoption of a particular youth development program and provider should ensure that there are common values and an agreement on purposes between the provider and the school.

**It is asked:**

*What links are made between the school’s broader visions and purpose and those that it and the program provider adopt for the youth development program?*

Similarly, the school needs to reinforce the value of the youth development program, whether it is offered in school time as one of a range of elective programs, or as an after-school activity program. The school needs to ensure that staff and the participating young people are aware that the programs are a valued and integral part of the wider school program through public comments and publicity, and also in the structural and financial arrangements that are made to support the program.

**It is asked:**

*Is there general acceptance and appreciation within the school community of the contribution that the youth development program can make to the broader school program?*
Program choice and learning approaches

Most youth development programs, whether operating in school or as after-school programs, involved voluntary participation by the young people. It was this ‘choice’ that distinguished youth development programs from other aspects of schooling. Young people in this study consistently highlighted that the choice to be involved was linked both to their enjoyment and to the achievement of positive outcomes.

Yet choice was not a simple issue. If the program was timetabled against other options, for example, and young people were compelled to choose one of these, that choice was curtailed. Secondly, if young people were required to maintain their involvement once they joined a program (e.g. for a two year period) irrespective of whether the activities did or did not meet their expectations or needs, then there was only an initial choice within an overall structure of compulsion. It was then even more important that the learning approaches adopted matched young people’s needs, interests and expectations.

Thirdly, if choice was between options designed by others (i.e. by teachers and program providers), this presented a limited and sometimes token form of program decision-making. In contrast, programs that involved young people as partners in actively designing, implementing and evaluating program approaches, moved beyond simplistic notions of choice to more significant decision-making.

Finally, there were frequently significant personal, social and institutional barriers that limited choice of program involvement by the most marginalised young people – who might benefit greatly from taking part in these programs – and programs are challenged to discover ways to target encouragement and support for the involvement by these young people, while maintaining their ability to choose whether or not to be involved.

It is asked:

Can young people choose to join these programs? How important is this? How is that choice linked to the learning approaches adopted?

How can programs enable young people to be partners in decision-making about the nature and implementation of the learning approaches that are adopted?

To what extent is choice of involvement appropriate within these programs, particularly when there are specific young people who would benefit from taking part, but who may not choose to join?

Theme 5: Participation

The capacity and opportunity to participate in program decision-making is consistently reported as of high importance in this and other research (e.g. Ausyouth, 2002e and 2003; Calvert and Zeldin, 2002; Pittman and Irby, 1996) in the achievement of program outcomes.

Youth participation in program decision-making is an intended outcome of ‘positive youth development’: that young people should be competent and committed citizens, with both the skills and inclination to exercise power over their lives and within their many communities; it is also an important learning approach that enables the achievement of other outcomes.

Active participation in decision-making is also part of other program processes. For example, in ‘doing things that help the community’, the capacity to decide what those ‘things’ were, rather than being instructed to undertake a certain community service, was seen by young people to be an essential part of that learning approach. Similarly, real-world decision-making on camps or in community projects provided an application and test of skills, judgement and leadership.

Young people said that they wanted to make decisions in a shared way with their teachers, but were realistic in their assessment of the extent to which they could or should control the programs. There was the recognition that, “they (teachers) can’t do what everyone wants but we all get a say and we all listen to one another.” This was seen to involve valuable learning and also contributed to effective decision-making. As one young person noted: “I think he wants us to learn how to make decisions and how to agree with one another when we don’t have the same idea.”
As a program approach, active participation has three clear impacts: on the outcomes for young people, on the learning processes used in programs, and on the relationships between adults and young people.

**Program outcomes:**

Student perceptions of learning outcomes were closely linked to their perceptions of program participation: those young people who indicated high or shared participation also rated their changes across the course of the program as greater in all outcome areas – overall knowledge, skills and attitudes, as well as teamwork, leadership, individual responsibility, self-discipline, confidence and community service.

Youth development programs provide opportunities for young people to gain knowledge and skills and to develop positive attitudes about their own ability and better appreciate skills and qualities in other people, in ways that may not be fully developed through regular schooling experiences. Their participation in program decision-making and implementation is also a key element in achieving increased self-esteem and confidence; it enables them to experience being valued, as adults listen to, respect and work with them and their ideas in order to reach mutually agreed decisions.

**Program processes:**

The degree of youth participation was one of the defining characteristics of youth development programs for many young people. It usually contrasted markedly to their school experiences where the opportunity to have a voice about what they wanted to do and how, and have their ideas listened to and taken seriously, was limited. The main exceptions were programs with clear hierarchies in their structure (including Defence Service Cadet programs) where young people knew that more senior people, whether young people or adults, had greater say and decision-making. In such cases, they recognised that they would also have that opportunity once they reached that rank; they understood from the outset that this was the nature of the program.

In comparing youth development programs with other available programs (within and beyond school), young people said that these programs were “freer than school”, as you had “more options” and were “trusted to try things”. Some were more specific by identifying they had “greater student involvement” where you “get to choose a lot about what you want”. A few clearly named that “you get more involved in deciding things and running them than you do at school.”

Young people’s satisfaction with their participation interacted with their general satisfaction with the program focus and activities, reflected in comments such as “We discuss things all the time. You know you will enjoy what you do because you have had a say”. Yet, if young people were happy with what they were doing, they were usually more accepting of program decision-making, even if they rated their influence on it as low. One young person explained:

> “When we are doing something we like, there is no reason to think the teachers are not cooperating with us… You don’t get a choice much, but if it’s something that you like, you don’t complain.”

The significance of the participation, and of the associated outcomes for young people, depended on how well programs understood and implemented participatory approaches. Most programs identified and utilised some forms of participation (e.g. consulting young people, but then having adults make final decisions; limiting participation to certain program elements) but many needed support to explore the potential for youth participation within their program design.

**Program relationships:**

Young people appreciated both formal and informal means by which they could participate in program implementation. They valued being listened to formally, but also saw that staff acknowledged their interest in ‘fun’ and ‘hands-on’ activities by building them into the program as often as possible. These activities also created opportunities for young people to have different relationships with teachers, especially when they occurred out of school, through excursions and camps. Teachers related to them better in these environments, listening to their ideas and discussing issues. When this occurred, young people were more likely to report that their participation in program decision-making was stronger, even in the absence of formal mechanisms. They felt that they had at least a shared role in ensuring that these valued aspects of learning approaches were included within their programs.
These relationships between young people and adults were often different to those in other school programs. Taking part in youth development programs was voluntary while, until young people turned 16, being at school was not voluntary. The greater freedom and variety in activities and the locations in which youth development programs occurred meant that there was shared interest, excitement and enthusiasm about what young people were doing. This created a different environment for young people-adult relationships, one where youth participation was more welcomed and supported.

Satisfaction with the program was frequently linked to young people’s perceived level of input to program decision-making. This affected what young people said about programs to their peers, particularly those who were considering joining. Given the influence of siblings and friends in program selection, poor experiences with program participation could have a negative impact on the numbers of young people selecting the program. In contrast, good experiences with program participation encouraged young people to promote the program as a valuable option with many benefits or positive outcomes.

Issues of inclusion in program decision-making need to be monitored. Young people, school and provider staff all strongly valued youth development programs being open to any young person. This means that programs need to respond to a diversity of young people with a range of opinions about what should happen in the program. Making sure that ‘everyone’s ideas are heard’, even if they were not acted upon, was highly valued and this required an environment where all young people’s ideas were invited and welcomed, and where discussion was encouraged. This might require special measures to ensure that ‘marginalised voices’ are heard and supported.

The important implications of this research for schools, program providers and State Programs include:

**The need for discussion and shared understanding about issues of youth participation**

Youth participation should be clearly included in program objectives. Although there were areas of agreement, young people and school or program provider staff did not always share similar ideas about what was meant by the participation of young people. For example, when young people had lower expectations of participation, they were happy to gain any opportunity for decision-making, however minor. They rated such changes as more important than did others who experienced participation as more central to the program and involving decisions on more substantial matters.

Participatory practices need to be discussed and understood at local levels by participants, schools and program providers, not just at a State Program level. Such discussion and clarification would limit some of the contention and confusion apparent in this research about what constitutes ‘youth participation’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It is asked:</th>
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<td>Over what things can or should young people be able to make decisions within programs?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What understanding is there on the degree of appropriate youth participation in these programs?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How can discussion on issues of youth participation be encouraged within youth development programs?</td>
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Teachers, young people and providers need to work towards shared understanding about the objectives and purposes of young people’s participation in the youth development program. This did not always occur in the programs in this research, in part because all parties were not involved in determining those objectives. Opportunities for active participation and for improved outcomes are lost in such instances.

“The bottom line is the students have an ongoing opportunity to have input to the direction of the participation. Once that stops, the whole lot fails. If you have an input into designing something then you have an interest in making that succeed. Take that away and it’s just another classroom exercise.” (Provider)

When there were unresolved differences of opinion between school and program provider staff about how flexible and youth-responsive the program content and approaches should be, the participation of young people can also be diminished. This was more likely to occur
It is asked:
Do school and provider staff share a good understanding of what youth participation means?
What support or training is provided in youth participation so that shared understandings develop?
How could such support and training be developed and offered? By whom?

Planning for youth participation as a learning approach

While the principles of good youth development practices place an emphasis on youth participation, it does not automatically follow that education systems, schools or program providers all design their programs with this intent or emphasis.

Some teachers were highly conscious of the level of participation of young people and encouraged them to take decision-making roles with the programs. In these cases such participation was a planned part of the learning approach, and was instituted in order to achieve specific learning outcomes e.g. teamwork, individual responsibility, leadership, positive and inclusive attitudes and increased confidence. In other situations, youth participation was a by-product of approaches to activities rather than being actively planned. It occurred more by default and was not given much focus, although occasionally it became incorporated as the flow-on benefits to other areas of schooling became obvious.

Some schools recognised that participation approaches may not be adopted easily and that a developmental approach with teachers and providers as well as young people will be required: “Getting students involved in decision-making needs to allow time – it needs to have the framework and structures to do that.” (Teacher)

Participating in doing something serious and purposeful

Some young people linked involvement in the community and youth participation. Participation then meant more than just the act of decision-making; it also signified taking part in real and purposeful activity in the wider world. It was thus a chance to show the community what they could do, be taken more seriously, earn respect and be seen to have the capacity to give opinions and participate in community decision-making.

Such decision-making also ensures that young people determine the nature of their community involvement – the focus and content of community service. Young people see themselves as members or ‘shapers’ of those communities, rather than as their ‘servants’.

It is asked:
Theme 6: School-provider relationships

The nature of the relationship between the community-based program provider and the school – whether it can be called a ‘partnership’ or not – is vital to the operation of the youth development program and to our understanding of it.

Ausyouth (2001a) talks specifically about ‘partnerships’ within good practice and suggests:

*Partnerships provide the mechanism for expanding, diversifying and enhancing processes and opportunities. They help avoid unnecessary duplication and offer the potential to maximise benefits for all partners. Partnerships can provide new and alternative ways of viewing and doing things by drawing upon the knowledge, expertise and resources held by the various partners. Quality processes are a feature of sustainable partnerships, which are most likely to maximise outcomes. (p. 34)*

Ausyouth documented the nature and processes of “effective partnerships for youth development between provider organisations and school communities” (Ausyouth, 2002b) and “school and community partnerships for youth development” (Ausyouth, 2002d). This study endorses much of the discussion and recommendations contained in those reports.

These youth development programs intend to create a new relationship that enables schools to offer a broader range of activities and experiences that enrich the learning and growth of young people. Schools get access to provider expertise; providers get access to student participants; together they achieve developmental goals for participants.

To be recognised as a ‘partnership’, there needs to be an explicit commitment to working together, an agreement on the roles each will take, shared planning around objectives and processes, and shared accountability for outcomes.

A partnership provides **coherence and agreement** in defining and achieving program goals and approaches, avoiding unnecessary duplication and offering the potential to maximise the impact of the partners. Differences in assumptions and intentions are discussed and resolved before they have an impact on program operations.

Secondly, partnerships in youth development programs improve program quality and delivery through what each partner **brings to the program**: new skills, knowledge and experiences, as well as new relationships between young people and adults or with young people from other schools and areas.

Thirdly, partnerships provide **benefits** for each of the partners: each is able to take something away from the relationship such as contact with young people, organisational exposure within a school community, and development of teacher and provider skills.

Fourthly, partnerships in youth development programs affect the **perception of young people** in the wider community and publicly endorse the value and engagement of young people. Young people are seen as competent, connected and committed.

The establishment of effective and productive partnerships requires all parties to work together. In some situations in this study, the breakdown of the relationship was the result of a lack of commitment to shared program operation or of a lack of effort by one or both group. There were significant differences in the way in which these relationships had been developed, fostered and maintained by all players – schools, providers and systems. Working together was not easy and could be limited both by practical considerations of time and other commitments, and by unspoken assumptions about roles, objectives, ways of working and desired benefits.

This research suggests the following areas for further consideration and discussion by and within programs:

**Agreement on objectives:**

Provider-school relationships need to be based on shared understandings and agreements about program objectives and program expectations: what each partner puts into the
program, what each partner does, and what each partner wants to achieve. Provider organisations and their key personnel need to be involved alongside schools in establishing these program goals and objectives. The best examples of provider-school relationships involve consistent personnel (staff and volunteers) who have developed the program together, discussed issues and approaches and responded to challenges over some time.

**It is asked:**
What processes can be established to gain agreements around expectations and program objectives? How can improved provider-school relationships be fostered and initiated? How can partnerships be supported to develop over time?

**Assistance and support required for program providers:**

Provider organisations have varying capacities to meet the demanding roles required within these programs. They need support and assistance to do so, especially where they rely on input from members at the local level.

However, provider organisations shared a high regard within their communities and usually had well developed programs, but some did not have adequate access to local resources to support community-based programs or be involved in program development. This restricted program expansion: many more schools would like to operate youth development programs but are limited by the capacity of the provider organisations. It also limited provider capacity to be equal players in the program relationship.

**It is asked:**
What support and assistance do provider organisations require to undertake their role in the program? What additional resources do providers need access to in order to engage in youth development programs? How best might this support and assistance be provided? Who should provide it?

**Cooperative decision-making:**

There are three key stakeholders in these relationships: schools (teachers), providers (staff or volunteers) and young people. The capacity of youth development programs to achieve all the outcomes suggested is strongly influenced by the quality of the provider-school relationship and the participation of all the three key stakeholders in program decision-making, including young people.

**It is asked:**
What planning processes can be established to enable young people, teachers and providers to engage in cooperative planning and decision-making?
Key ideas:

Outcomes

- While schools generally had specific aims and objectives in mind when they initiated youth development programs, there was little evidence of these aims and objectives being made explicit or documented by programs, and little formal collection of data or evaluation of programs against these aims and objectives. At the start of their programs, most young people also had a very limited view of what program objectives were and what they could expect in terms of learning outcomes. Schools, providers, communities and young people should be clear about and agree on the nature of outcomes, be able to articulate these as program objectives, and design program activities to achieve those objectives.
- There were sometimes substantial differences between what young people expected from programs and what they saw occurred. When youth development programs provided opportunities for young people to participate in program decision-making, program goals were more likely to match what participants wanted to achieve.
- There was little evidence of formal processes for the recording of the outcomes and benefits for young people at the local program level. Most outcomes were anecdotal, and there were very few formal processes for tracking and recording outcomes at an individual or group level. While many teachers and providers agreed it would be valuable to do this, they did not see themselves as sufficiently resourced with knowledge, skills, time or funds to do it in an effective way, and requested support in the development of tools and processes.

Community connections

- Opportunities for any form of community involvement occurred less in these programs than young people and others would like. Community involvement provided an ideal and meaningful environment for effective learning.
- The nature of the activities provided for young people as community involvement had an influence on how young people saw themselves in relation to their community. Young people were situated as ‘servants’ rather than ‘shapers’ of community. Programs need to be clearer about their intentions for community involvement, and communicate this intention to young people.

Inclusion

- Inclusive youth development programs encouraged a diverse range of young people to become involved. They provided a model of operation that created a sense of belonging for young people and helped them to learn to build respect for and care of each other across difference.
- Many comments supported the inclusion and involvement of ‘at risk’ young people or those with problems, provided that the programs were not exclusively for them. However, unless schools and providers were clear about their intentions to gain a mix of young people and examined their practices in order to achieve this, programs could easily either exclude those already marginalised in schools (who perhaps lacked confidence to join) or, on the other hand, become stigmatised and marginalised programs that concentrated failure experiences for young people.
- The promotion of inclusive processes within programs, including the development of a sense of belonging among young people, directly linked to achievement of desired outcomes of programs.

Learning approaches

- Specific teaching and learning strategies and opportunities need to be structured into programs to achieve desired outcomes. These involved activities that were seen by young people (and others) as meaningful and purposeful. The concept of applying and testing theoretical learning in a real situation occurred frequently in student comments.
- It was important that there was a unity of purpose between the school ethos and program objectives. The school’s role in reinforcing the value of the youth development program was vital.

Participation

- Youth participation in program decision-making was both an intentional learning approach that characterised these programs, and also a component of other learning approaches. However, the emphasis on youth participation was not uniform across programs. Programs need support to understand, agree on and implement participatory approaches. Youth participation is a developmental process that requires planning and learning.
Present needs and future directions

This study has mainly involved reporting on young people’s perceptions of the outcomes of state-sponsored youth development programs. It has provided some scoping of the issues associated with program operation as they affect those outcomes. It has identified some of the program needs and future roles at school, state and national levels.

The study also notes the extensive recommendations contained in the Ausyouth document on **Future Directions in Youth Development** (Ausz, 2002c) and endorses many of the points raised in that agenda for policy, research and program development. Those have a wider scope than the issues addressed in this study.

In this final section, this study compiles some statements of current program needs and suggests attention to issues for incorporation in future program design in order to build more effective student outcomes.

**Policy and Program Operation**

The first set of suggestions arising from this study addresses the needs of policy and program development at three levels. The suggestions are structured to follow the major themes that have run through this study.

**School programs:**

**Specifying and Assessing Program Objectives and Outcomes**

- Schools, providers and young people should jointly determine clear and agreed statements of program objectives and desired outcomes.
- Schools should document their youth development program aims and objectives more clearly and report against these each year.
- All young people and their families should be provided with clear information about program objectives and planned activities.
- Program promotion and planning should focus on what the young people value: hands-on activities, fun, activities outside schools, a broad range of activities, opportunities to develop new relationships and skills.
- Programs should conduct regular assessment of student outcomes and evaluation of student satisfaction with youth development programs.

**Participation**

- Program planning should incorporate a specific commitment to the participation of young people in all aspects of program development and implementation, recognising that decision making by young people in the activities in which they engage contributes to the quality of their learning experiences.
- Promotion of youth development programs should highlight the active participation of young people in program decision-making and the key program outcomes that young
people can achieve (skills and knowledge, confidence and teamwork) that are linked to participation.

**Learning Activities**

- Youth development programs should include and further develop cooperative activities and approaches that support young people to understand each other better as people, recognising that this assists in the achievement of desired program outcomes.
- Program operations should ensure the active participation of young people by including different learning approaches that emphasise shared influence and decision-making between young people and staff.
- Policies and practices about uniforms should be flexible enough to ensure that they do not have a negative impact on the quality of learning in the programs and the retention of young people in the programs.

**Inclusion**

- Programs should endorse the principle of young people’s choice of joining youth development programs, and reject approaches that compel involvement.
- Programs should remain open to the involvement of all young people.
- Programs should investigate and remove barriers and processes that exclude any young people or groups of young people from involvement.
- Specific measures should be taken within schools and programs to ensure that marginalised young people (for whom such programs may be particularly valuable) are provided with support and encouragement to be involved.

**Community**

- Programs should include and recognise an objective of enhanced connection of young people with their communities.
- Programs should give increased recognition to the importance of the community as a valuable learning environment.
- Programs should incorporate more activities that provide young people with the opportunity to be involved with (or as part of) their communities, and to assist and contribute to those local communities.
- Programs should support young people to be participants in community decision-making.

**Partnerships**

- School staff, provider personnel and young people should plan programs together, including the discussion and establishment of overall program goals and objectives as well as specific program activities.
- Part of the planning process should include discussion around making the expectations – of schools, providers and young people – more explicit to all parties.
- Programs should make maximum use of local providers’ expertise and networks in order to make the program’s activities ‘real’ i.e. to more clearly provide meaning and purpose to these activities.

**State Programs:**

**Specifying and Assessing Program Objectives and Outcomes**

- State Programs should develop a central ‘bank’ of appropriate pro-formas, and sample aims and objectives to support program planning processes.  

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8 Teachers said in this study: “Having access to a suitable tool that schools could use would have been valuable. As teachers, we are willing to do this (assessment and evaluation) but the time involved is prioritised to establishing and running the program. A readily available tool, rather than having to develop one, would make it possible to do a better job of assessment and evaluation.”
• State Programs should offer professional development for teachers, providers and young people around program planning.
• State Programs should require all local funded programs to report against their objectives at regular intervals.
• Processes, tools and documents should be developed to assist schools and providers in the assessment, monitoring and evaluation of outcomes and benefits for young people participating in youth development programs.

Participation
• State Programs should require funded programs to demonstrate how they support and encourage the active participation of young people in program decision-making.
• State Programs should offer professional development for teachers, providers and young people around strategies for youth participation in decision-making.
• State Programs and central provider groups should organise opportunities for young people in programs to network and meet together to share experiences and learnings.

Learning Activities
• State Programs should share documentation of effective practice.
• State Programs should develop resource banks of good practice ideas.
• State Programs should offer professional development for teachers, providers and young people around effective program practices.
• State Programs should develop advice and support to local programs around procedural and legal issues that restrict youth involvement in communities.

Inclusion
• State Programs should require funded programs to demonstrate the measures they are taking to include all young people in access to and success within programs.

Community
• State Programs should develop and share documentation of community involvement and connection beyond that of community service models.
• State Programs should offer professional development for teachers, providers and young people around community involvement strategies.

Partnerships
• State Programs should make maximum use of the providers’ expertise and their networks in order to make program activities ‘real’ i.e. to more clearly provide meaning and purpose to these activities.
• Provider organisations should provide appropriate and adequate support to local staff and volunteers in order to ensure continuity of effective involvement.

The Australian Government:

Specifying and Assessing Program Objectives and Outcomes
• The Australian Government should undertake a capacity building role through funding youth development research at a state and national level (see below).
• The Australian Government should undertake a capacity building role through initiating and coordinating sharing and resourcing mechanisms between State-based youth development programs.
• The Australian Government should support and coordinate the national development of appropriate resources (including tools) to support processes of program planning, assessment of outcomes for young people and evaluation of programs.  

Participation
• The Australian Government should develop resources and models for the active participation of young people in youth development program decision-making by linking to and/or building on existing resources at state and national levels.
• The Australian Government should audit and develop policy statements to emphasise youth participation as integral to the planning and operation of youth development programs.  

Learning Activities
• The Australian Government should support State Programs in the development and dissemination of good practice models in youth development programs, and in sharing these between states.
• The Australian Government should develop and coordinate a national approach to issues of restrictions and legalities in order that young people can undertake community-based activities with all providers. Such issues would include duty of care, supervision and cost of insurance. Such coordination might involve the formation of a national research task group drawn from State Programs and national providers.  

Inclusion
• The Australian Government should coordinate a national scoping study on barriers to involvement and success within youth development programs. This should include specific investigation of the barriers to the involvement of Indigenous young people, of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) young people, and of young people with disabilities.  

Community
• The Australian Government should share documentation on the role of young people as developers and shapers of communities, and the role of youth development programs in going beyond ideas of community service.  

Partnerships
• The Australian Government should convene regular gatherings of State Program personnel to share program information and directions at a national level.
• The Australian Government should convene regular gatherings of major youth development program providers to share information, strategies and resources.  

Further research
In providing an overview of outcomes from youth development programs as identified by young people (as well as teachers and program providers), and identifying some of the factors in program operation that shape those outcomes, this study has highlighted the need for coordination of further data collection and analysis around specific areas of youth development practice.

It is firstly recommended that the Australian Government take up the role of funding and coordinating youth development research at a state and national level with a view to building the capacity of the sector.

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9 Some teachers drew attention to one possible tool from the Queensland Education Department at: http://education.qld.gov.au/strategic/accountability/docs/social_outcomes_administratoin_guide.pdf
10 This would build on the MCEETYA 2004 statement on youth participation in government decision-making.
In addition, the study points to specific issues that have emerged within this research, about which some indications are provided, but where further research is needed:

- What stops youth development theory, concepts and practice being linked into and embedded within secondary school pedagogy, and how does this relate to other ‘alternative’ programs/curriculum?

- What are the systemic blocks to the implementation of youth development programs on a wider basis in secondary schools including, but not limited to, issues of time and equitable resourcing across the state?

- An action research study should be undertaken on how youth development programs can contribute to efforts to increase school retention at a state level.

- What are the barriers to inclusion, participation and success in youth development programs for specific under-represented groups? How are successful programs addressing these, and what is learnt from this for wider strategies?

- Specifically, research should explore Indigenous young people’s experience of youth development programs and build on studies such as ACER Indigenous research strategy in education.
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