

**2<sup>nd</sup> Regional Conference on Tutoring & Mentoring  
Perth, Western Australia  
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***Using Community Mentors to Assist Young People to Make Successful  
Transitions in Life***

by

**Lesley Tobin – Dusseldorp Skills Forum**

**Workshop Summary**

## **Dusseldorp Skills Forum**

A small, not-for-profit organisation with a charter to stimulate innovation in education and employment practices [www.dsf.org.au](http://www.dsf.org.au)

### **The Situation in Australia**

- School retention rates are falling
- Youth unemployment is high
- Single parent families are increasing
- Many children will grow up in a non-working family
- Many children will grow up without a 'significant male adult' in their lives
- Many young people go 'off the rails' at critical transition points in their lives

### **The Research**

1. Dusseldorp Skills Forum:  
Reality and Risk (1998) and The Deepening Divide (1999)
  - Australian Council for Educational Research
  - Brotherhood of St Laurence
  - The Monash University - ACER Centre for Economics and Training
  - Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne
  - National Centre of Social and Economic Modelling, University of Canberra
  - National Centre for Vocational Education Research
  - National Institute of Labour Studies, Flinders University of South Australia
2. Australian National University: Centre for Economic Policy Research

### **School Retention Rates**

- apparent national Year 12 retention rates have fallen from 77% in 1992 to 71.3% in 1996 (as opposed to the Finn Targets of 95% by 2001)
- nearly all of the decline has occurred in the government sector
- the decline has been more rapid for males (6.6% to 65.9%) than females (5% to 77%)

### **Australia: Youth Unemployment**

- 40% of all Australia's unemployed people are under the age of 24
- The unemployment rate for teenagers is three times the level experienced by older workers
- Youth unemployment has been above 20% for more than a decade

### **Marginalisation of young people**

unemployed and not studying	78,000
working part time only and not studying	68,000
not studying and not in labour market	43,000
	<hr/>
	187,000

### **Centre for Economic Policy Research**

- It is not known what proportion of their first fifteen years of life children spend in a jobless family but it is quite conceivable that half our children spend five or more years in a family without work.
- The average period of time in a family without an employed adult male is higher, probably eight years or more.
- Joblessness among families is concentrating on families where both partners are early school leavers.

### **The Challenge**

Originating from a discussion group on Barbara Lepani's paper, "Wisdom Leadership in Elders", a small group of people formed the nucleus for ARM (Active Retirees and Mentors). ARM developed an umbrella organisation for non-working people who are searching for ways to remain engaged with their community whilst at the same time making use of their skills and life experiences.

### **Central Coast ARM: The Vision**

"To engage retirees and others in the community by developing mentoring activities to enrich both the lives of the mentors and the community"

### **Central Coast ARM: The Focus**

- building partnerships with key community organisations;
- recruiting volunteers;

- providing quality mentoring resources and training;
- supporting existing volunteer programs..... and
- developing new mentoring programs to engage these volunteers.

### **Why Mentoring?**

A longitudinal study (1988) of 700 children born on the Hawaiian Island of Kauai. All the children were born in extreme poverty to parents who laboured at local sugar and pineapple plantations. In most cases, one parent was either alcoholic or mentally ill; over the years many of the youth showed signs of mental disturbance.

Using data from the first 30 years of the lives of these children, the study found that the youth who ‘succeeded’ showed an ability to locate an adult in addition to their parents who could help them cope with the world:

“While Werner’s study emphasises the resilience of the youth– including an innate ability to find helping elders – it may be that making those elders easier to find, or actually providing them, might have some impact on at-risk youth who are not yet resilient.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Big Brothers /Big Sisters**

- Big Brothers /Big Sisters programs maintain 75,000 active matches (1998 in USA) between a volunteer adult and a young person.

### **Evaluation Study**

Conducted by Public/Private Ventures

A sample of 959 young people – half were provided with a mentor immediately, the other half had to wait for 18 months:

- Most of the youth in the research sample were between the ages 10 and 14;
- Nearly 60 percent were members of a minority group;
- More than 60 percent were boys;
- Most were near poor to poor
- Many live in families with histories of substance abuse and/or domestic violence.

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<sup>1</sup> Marc Freedman: Elder Mentors and At-Risk Youth

## **The Results**

Little Brothers and Sisters who met with their "Bigs" regularly for about a year were:

- 46% less likely than their peers to use illegal drugs and 27% less likely to start drinking;
- 52% less likely than their peers to skip a day of school and 37% less likely to skip a class;
- more trusting of their parents or guardians, less likely to lie to them, and felt more supported and less criticised by their peers and friends.

## **The Plan**

To offer young people effective support at critical transition points in their lives

### **What are these critical transition points?**

- Primary to High School
- Year 10 to 11
- Leaving School
- First Employment

## **The Partners**

- Central Coast ARM
- TAFE Outreach
- Schools
- Central Coast Enterprises & Organisations
- The Community

## **Central Coast ARM**

Responsible for :

- Co-ordination of mentoring activities
- Support of mentors throughout mentoring activities
- Liaison between the partners
- Developing new mentoring activities
- Recruitment of mentors from the retired and business community

## **TAFE Outreach**

*A charter to work with and respond to community needs*

**Responsible for:**

- **Mentor training**
- **Recruitment of mentors through community networks**
- **Further development of Mentors**

## **Schools**

**Responsible for :**

- **Providing a contact teacher to liaise with the ARM coordinator on a regular basis**
- **Probity checks on mentors**
- **Providing in-school support for mentors**
- **Providing staff development for key teachers**

## **The Mentors**



## **Mentor Characteristics?**

- **good listeners**
- **like young people**
- **have some spare time**
- **make a regular commitment for a period of time**
- **willing to participate in TAFE training**
- **satisfy a police check - no criminal record or dubious background**
- **care about the future of young people**

## **The Commitment**

Approximately 2 hours per week for a year

12 weeks of training with TAFE OUTREACH

12 weeks of supported mentoring practicum

Placement /Match

## **Are the Mentors Trained?**

Yes, this assists the mentors to:

- Understand the issues involved in mentoring
- Become more confident
- Be better prepared
- Demonstrate commitment
- Have the support of fellow mentors

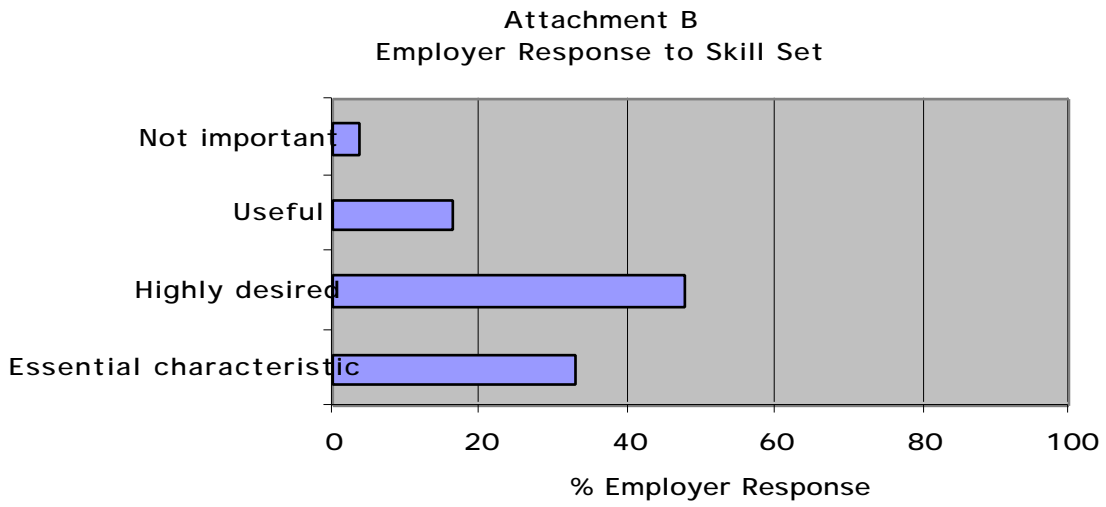
## **BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT**

### **Survey: The Value of Mentoring Skills**

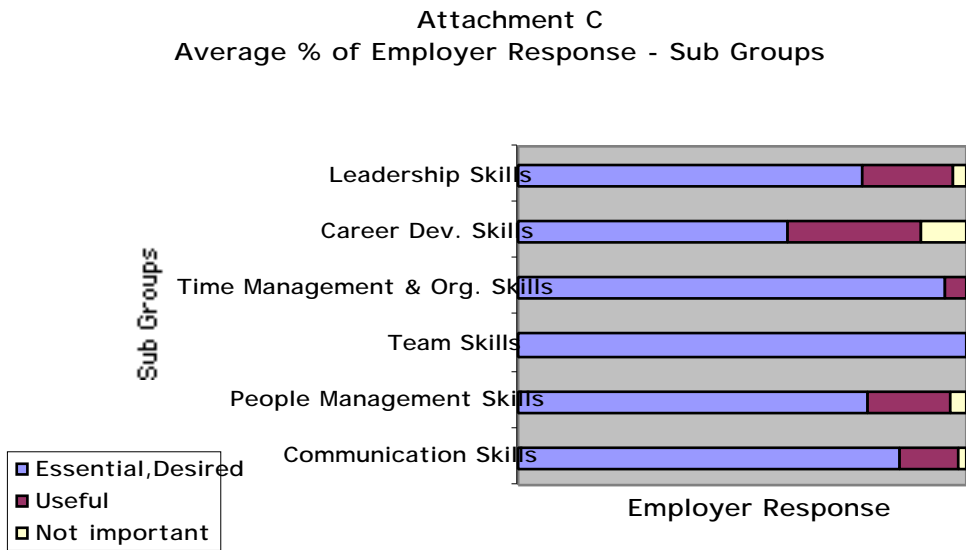
Businesses were surveyed to find out how important the mentoring skills were in a workplace setting. For example:

- ✓ Ability to maintain working relationships
- ✓ Demonstrated understanding and tolerance of different types of people
- ✓ Ability to problem solve
- ✓ Ability to identify and respond to the needs of other people
- ✓ Willingness to help others
- ✓ Willingness to take responsibility
- ✓ Willingness to seek out and learn new skills and knowledge
- ✓ Ability to set goals and priorities.
- ✓ Demonstrated understanding of own strengths and weaknesses
- ✓ Demonstrated motivation for the task at hand

## Survey Response: Skill Set



## Survey Response: Sub Groups



## **The Conclusion**

Those who participate as Mentors will gain skills that will be valuable in a workplace context and.....

Employers whose staff participate in these programs will also benefit from their employees developing those skills.

This enabled us to seek support from the business community to provide mentors.

## **School-to-Work Plans Mentoring**

- Initially a DET Pilot Project but did not include mentoring
- Mentors were introduced to work with students in the project

## **Why School To Work Plans?**

Students who don't complete their Year 12 certificate are three times more likely to become engaged in marginal activities for extended periods, than those who have completed their education to Year 12.

## **Student Selection**

1. Self-select
2. "Pushed" by parents ..... or
3. Students nominated on basis of Year 10 "decision time" choice - leaving school and no particular pathway identified

## **Matching**

- Based on personality and interests
- Mentors and Mentees have an opportunity to request a match after initial group activities

## **Timing**

- During sport time or class time every week - 1.5 hours each session
- Approximately three months, finishing with a presentation of findings and a celebration

## **STW Plans Mentoring - Evaluation**

- Timing was important - mentors and students needed the structure of same time/same place each week
- The purpose initially took up 100% of the sessions - this was gradually reduced to allow the relationship to develop
- Debriefing sessions each week were a critical aspect of the program
- Mentors needed to feel valued by the co-ordinator
- Mentors could only mentor one student at a time
- BBQs were an essential (unrealised) ingredient

## **Other important features**

- Lunches for mentor debrief provided by school
- Sign-on book and Photo ID cards for all mentors
- Acknowledgement of mentors by school, parents etc

## **A Cascading Effect**

School-to-Work Plans students in years 9 & 10

—  
Supported by a mentor through the program

—  
Trained as mentors for 627 project

—  
Support year six students before entering high school

## **What is the 627 Mentor Program?**

Targeted (at risk) students in year 6 investigate high school

Mentors (from the Year 9/10 STW group) meet the students on a weekly basis during school (alternate sites)

Mentors use their previous experiences and their knowledge of “how high school really works” to assist their mentee’s investigations.

## **Student-Driven Content**

Year Six students worked through a brainstorming session with their teachers to develop the content for the course:

- Me and My Mentor
- Physical Aspects of High School
- Outside the Classroom
- The Canteen
- Sport and PE
- Subjects and Teachers
- Routines
- First Week in High School
- Uniforms
- Awards and Penalties

## **The Future**

To support each 'early school leaver' by matching him or her with a community mentor for at least the first 12 months after leaving school

## **What Have We Learnt?**

Important factors:

- Start with an “easy/positive” group
- Co-ordination
- Structure /Process
- Purpose
- Training
- Support of Mentors
- Screening
- Realistic Expectations
- Have regular, informal BBQs
- Celebration
- Recognition
- Evaluation
- Careful Selection and Matching

## **Mentoring Resources on the www**

### **The National Mentoring Partnership**

<http://www.mentoring.org>

### **The Chicago Tutor Mentor Connection**

<http://www.tutormentorconnection.org>

### **Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory**

<http://www.nwrel.org>

### **Twin Cities 1-to-1**

<http://www.mentoringworks.org>

### **Public/Private Ventures**

<http://tap.epn.prg/ppv>

## **Good Reading**

(Available from Public Private Ventures Website )

Big Brother/Big Sisters: A Study of Program Practices  
Kathryn Furano, Phoebe A Roaf, Melanie B Styles and  
Alvia Y Branch – 1993

Partners in Growth: Elder Mentors and At-Risk Youth  
Marc Freedman 1988

The Kindness of Strangers: Reflections on the Mentoring Movement  
Marc Freedman 1993

**Lesley Tobin:** Following a teaching career of 16 years, Lesley Tobin began working with the Dusseldorp Skills Forum to establish one of the first workplace learning programmes in Australia – TRAC. Since then she has worked on a number of different projects related to young people's involvement in education and employment. Of note, she coordinated the National TRAC Unit, assisted in the establishment of the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation, and was integral in the development and implementation of Central Coast Career WorkKeys.

In her current position as the Project Manager for the Dusseldorp Skills Forum, Lesley is working with the Central Coast community (NSW) to develop mentoring strategies which address the needs of young people at critical transition points in their lives.

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