PROSPECTUS

Service system reform

for the prevention of youth homelessness and disengagement from education

TGP

An integrated model for early intervention

TGP is well on the way to showing how to reduce school drop out, homelessness and youth offending rates, and the associated social and financial costs.

It is both a ground breaking and life-changing approach.

What is TGP?

A ground-breaking, community partnership model to help young people at risk

The Geelong Project (TGP) is a ground breaking, 'community of schools and youth services' model of early intervention for young people at risk of disengaging with school, becoming homeless and entering the justice system.

It represents a unique partnership between schools and agencies who are committed to confronting and resolving long-standing issues of school disengagement, homelessness and offending in the Geelong community. It has been developed over a period of five years and is based on a solid body of Australian research in early intervention.

The partnership, led by Time for Youth with Barwon Youth, Swinburne University and Geelong Local Learning & Employment Network (LLEN), has involved direct contributions from agencies across homelessness, youth justice, family violence, mental health, disability, education and employment, recreation, cultural diversity and aboriginal services. TGP is supported by local governments including City of Greater Geelong, Borough of Queenscliffe, Surf Coast Shire and Golden Plains Shire and through G21 Geelong Regional Alliance.

Patchwork funding from Commonwealth, State and community sources enabled TGP to go 'live' with a skilled research and service delivery development team in two school catchments in 2012/13.

Internationally recognised and transferable

While it is a 'live' Geelong-based project, TGP has attracted national and international interest because it is implementing a series of major innovations and local system reforms in early intervention.

It is tackling the very real problem identified in recent government reports of fragmented, uncoordinated planning and disconnected service delivery to young people. It is not simply building on existing service systems, it is offering an innovative platform for a reform of services for vulnerable youth in Education and the Community Sector.

TGP now needs investment in 2013/14 through 2014/15 to complete the platform and consolidate the evidence for wider cost saving application beyond Geelong.

It has already been recognised as demonstrating significant potential for implementation in other locations through its systemic approach.

"Your work is so timely, important and significant–internationally."

Professor Hal A. Lawson, Ph.D., Professor of Social Welfare & Policy Studies, University at Albany, New York

Life-changing for young people and families

Most importantly, it is changing the lives of young people who are being overlooked by the current service system. TGP is proactively identifying vulnerable young people and their families and re-engaging them by providing new opportunities.

It is reducing rates of early school drop-out and homelessness by supporting young people in the context of their families, and impacting on associated problems such as family violence, youth offending, substance abuse and mental health concerns.

An integrated way of schools and services working together

The strength in this model of 'community of schools and youth services' is that it engages and integrates the work of all of the key people and providers that together can make the difference in helping to re-engage the young person with school, family and community.

Reforming the system

TGP provides an innovative solution to problems inherent in the youth services system.

It offers:

- **A systemic and proactive approach to identifying risk (population screening), using a sophisticated but practical Student Needs Survey.**

  A partnership approach, along with the related tools, guidelines and protocols enables young people at risk to be located and makes early intervention possible.

- **A flexible and responsive case practice framework for service delivery that is youth-focused and family-centred**

  A 3-tier triage and wraparound response by a well-trained team that focuses on the client, not the program.

- **A place-based, 'community of schools and youth services' approach linking schools and agencies**

  Reform of this nature requires effective governance. TGP has had this through the Early Intervention Working Group, TGP Steering Group, and will transition to an even stronger governance platform.

- **A website to support cross-sectoral collaboration and information sharing and an E-Wellbeing cross-sectoral database**

  This facilitates practice while progressively delivering evidence on outcomes.

- **Integrated professional development for collaborative inter-disciplinary team work**

  A collaborative training and development program across partner agencies.

- **An evaluation and research framework based on an Action Research Model including unit costing**

  A detailed outcome measurement strategy has been developed and there is parallel 'cost of homelessness' research in progress.

Providing compelling outcomes

A trial of the project has produced compelling outcomes for vulnerable young people in Geelong, with:

100%

remaining engaged in school, increasing engagement or returning to school (who were not attending regularly or had recently left)

100%

supported at home or obtaining safe, sustainable accommodation

TGP is demonstrating that seemingly intractable community problems of school disengagement and youth homelessness are not insurmountable and can be successfully addressed by developing close collaboration between schools and community service organisations.

However there is still work to be done to ensure all schools and relevant services are fully engaged with this new way of working together.

Time for Youth, with support from DHS, has partnered with Geelong Police over the past three years to develop and deliver a youth offending early intervention program. This program has received a positive evaluation by KPMG. The time is right to cross-fertilize key practice and research elements of TGP with the Geelong Youth Support Service.

Fast facts

In its first operational phase
TGP identified and responded to

95
young people
and

41
family members
including
10% from CALD backgrounds.

For all it appears to have been the first program to identify the participants as being at-risk of homelessness and to assess all of the risk factors in their lives.

If left unsupported these factors could lead many to a lifetime of homelessness, mental illness, low socio-economic employment, entry into the justice system or worse, life threatening despair.

In most cases our early intervention team offered the first case worker to ever discuss their challenges at home and at school.

60% of our young clients were dealing with
family violence

90% showed evidence of
disengaging from school

22% of young people and family members had a disability that was
unknown or unsupported

28% of youth and **32%** of parents had
alcohol and drug abuse issues

48% had unaddressed
mental health issues

Vision

The vision for TGP for the next two years is to expand its substantial success through the next phase of action research, model development and early intervention service delivery.

By the end of 2015 we envisage

- All the elements of an integrated 'schools and youth services' model in place including shared client data systems, a trained cross sector workforce and co-location of early intervention services
- An expanded TGP that includes ALL Education Department catchments and public schools in Greater Geelong as part of an integrated early intervention service
- Benchmark results with young people and their families resulting in major reductions in youth homelessness, school drop-out and youth offending
- An early intervention platform in place that integrates community early intervention responses to young people at risk of homelessness, school drop-out and offending
- Measurable and demonstrable \social and economic savings for the community as a result of community building capacity and system reforms
- A fully documented model with related tools that is able to be reproduced (with local variations) within other areas and regions across the State and country

You can be part of realising this vision

Funding arrangements have changed and TGP is relying on resourcing and community contributions to fully develop the service. Right now we know that there are over 500 young people in the wider Geelong catchment needing an immediate response to avoid homelessness and disengagement with school.

Further long-term government funding is also being sought, but is contingent on:

- the level of support provided by the community
- further proof that the model works
- a co-ordinated approach between government departments

In the interim, the future of a large cohort of vulnerable young people and their families is in the balance. (See more details under Investment on page 18)

CASE STUDY

Sarah: from Darkness to Success

Sarah was identified at-risk through a school survey initiated by TGP. Case workers subsequently met with her to discuss how she was doing at school and at home. In this meeting, it became apparent that Sarah was suffering from anxiety, had been in trouble with the police, was running away from home and was not attending school very often, and was now displaying symptoms of suicidal behaviour. Her parent describes the chaos of the system below:

"When my daughter first presented as a candidate for 'The Geelong Project' she was in a state of despair and hopelessness, she was lost in a system that wasn't able to provide her with the desperate help she needed. I had no idea where to turn; I lived in a state of fear: a fear of losing a child, of not being able to help her, even though she was frantically crying out for help. The many assessments, doctor visits, police involvements, hospital visits and counselling sessions were not able to provide the long-term help she needed. Faced with incidents of self-harm, suicidal thoughts and living through the panic of her running away has brought us so much anguish – these feelings are awful and indescribable. The intervention of the Geelong Project meant my daughter's voice was finally heard, she felt someone cared enough to listen and work with her…if it were not for TGP, I may not have a child today."

Outcomes of TGP proactive identification and intervention:

- Ceased self-harming
- Suicidal thoughts stopped
- No further running away from home
- Attending school full-time and planning future career goals
- Confident and forming new friendships at school
- Re-established relationship with estranged father
- Mother less anxious of daughter's wellbeing and can work again

Early intervention

Early intervention can be defined in many ways.

In the context of TGP, it is intervening early with young people at secondary school level who are clearly identified to be at risk of disengaging from school and family and entering the homelessness and related service systems. These are young people who display warning signs such as running away from home, couch surfing, regularly missing school and contact with police.

The earlier that indications of risk can be obtained about homelessness, early school leaving or other issues, the more effective early intervention can be.

As schools are the universal agency that most young people engage with during adolescence, they are the ideal sites for early intervention.

In the TGP trial, a Swinburne University developed Student Needs Survey (SNS) has been used as a core element of the population screening process. The SNS is being further developed into an Australian Index of Adolescent Development (AIAD). Geelong is the demonstration site.

Importantly, TGP has identified that improving school retention for vulnerable young people requires interventions to address family issues that are among the most formative factors in early school leaving as well as the onset of youth homelessness.

"The impact of early intervention is phenomenal because the young people are far more receptive to receiving support and improving their lives if you can help them at a time when their situation is not deeply entrenched...we're not waiting until young people are not going to school or are on the streets; we're getting in before the wheels fall off so they can realise their potential."

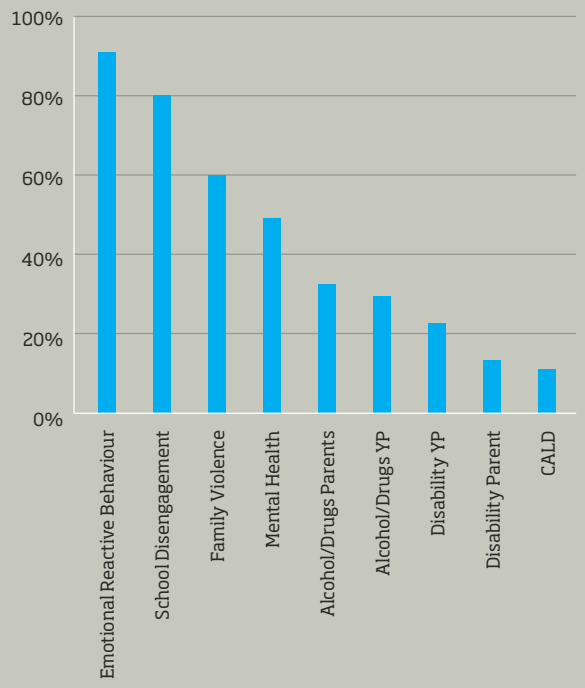
- Trudy Brown, TGP Team Leader

"We have a terrific wellbeing team and it has given them additional resources to try and identify and support vulnerable kids before their difficulties become too great for them."

- Phil Honeywell, Principal, Newcomb Secondary College

Risk factors

The presenting risk factors of the 95 young people TGP has identified and supported in this trial show how critical the early intervention platform is, given how complex and difficult to access the service system is.



Case study

Mary is an unaccompanied refugee minor attempting to complete secondary school without stable accommodation and without ever receiving prior medical treatment or trauma counselling. Mary was referred to TGP by a partnering school as there was an imminent risk of homelessness. Upon assessment, it became apparent that Mary and her sister and cousin were all in need of support, not offered to them previously. All three young women from war torn Liberia were about to be made homeless within 48 hours. Mental health staff, TGP workers and staff from the two schools involved all collaborated in the best interests of the women.

Outcomes:

- Short-term and permanent accommodation obtained
- Material aid provided
- Medical appointments scheduled
- Trauma counselling offered for the first time
- Relationships with siblings and extended family they were unable to live with strengthened
- Remained in secondary education and aspiring to further study
- Linked into other supports as required, through their TGP worker i.e. mental health support

Service reform

"Although Victoria has a substantial range of early intervention services with the potential to support vulnerable children, young people and their families they do not come together to form a comprehensive, coherent and coordinated system of early interventions ..."[2]

In relation to student retention rates and the problem of disengagement, the Victorian Auditor General's Report, Student completion rates (Nov 2012) suggests:

"A more purposeful, coordinated and strategic approach is required if significant improvements are to be made to completion rates."

In Geelong, there are a confounding 77 separate partnerships between schools and funded services, with only 4% of the work focussed on engaging the young person's family.

The Better Youth Services City of Greater Geelong report revealed that

60%

of young people surveyed in Geelong did not know where to get help.

TGP has the vision and the reform agenda to address this fragmented system and reform service delivery. It provides a solution to well-documented systemic problems and takes up the challenge of wider reform agendas in the education and human services sectors.

Key issues in the youth services system addressed by TGP include:

- **a fragmented and poorly co-ordinated system**
- **a program rather than client focus**
- **services that fail to consider family circumstances**
- **a focus on solving problems *after* they occur[1]**

TGP is a reformist model, with the potential to effect significant change and ticks many of the boxes on the government's service reform agendas.

[1]Victorian Government, 'Human Services: The Case for Change'

[2]Justice Cummins, 'Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry', cited by Shergold, Prof. Peter AC, 'Service Sector Reform: A roadmap for community and human services reform'

Out of darkness

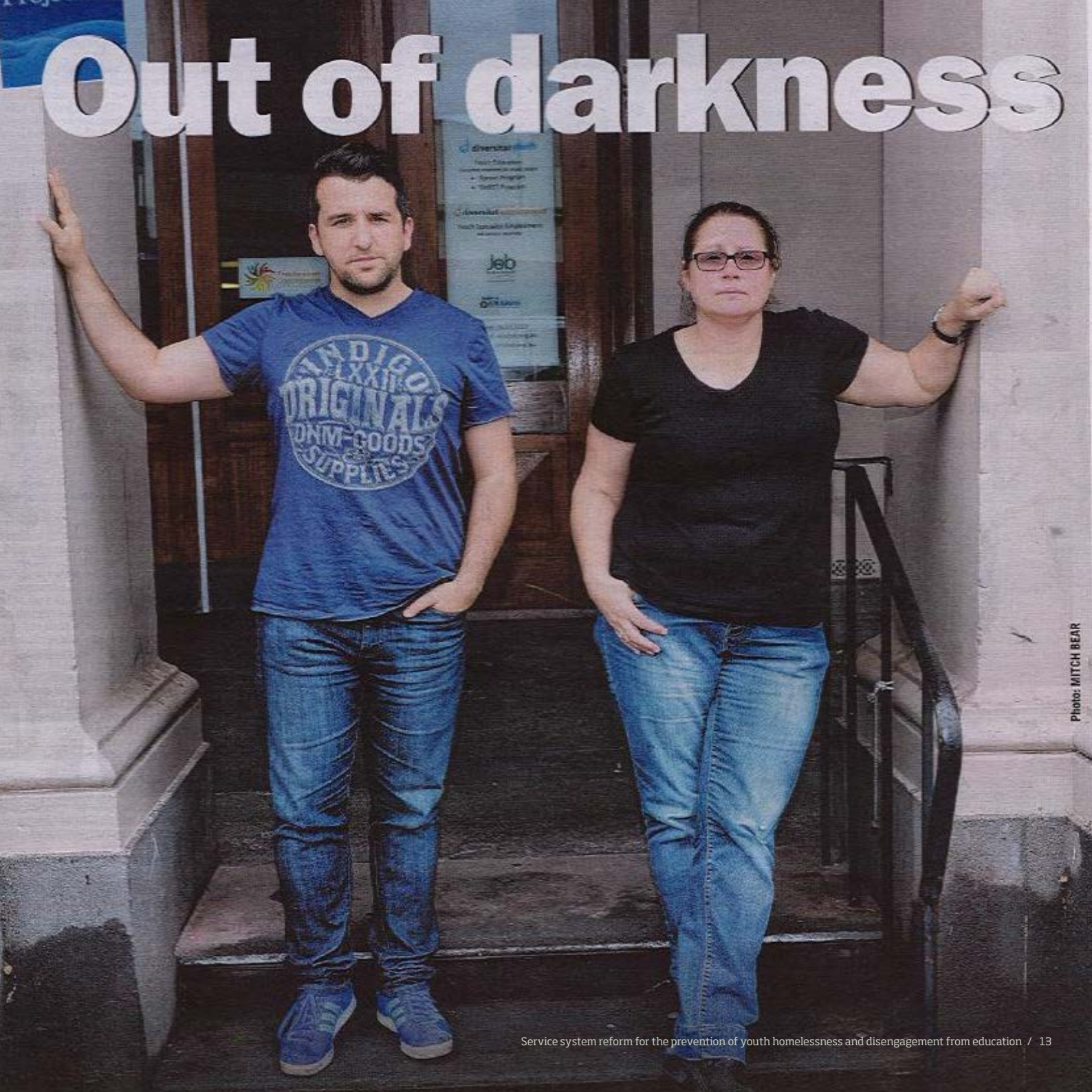


Photo: MITCH BEAR

How does it work?

TGP works on a system development and reform level as well as service delivery reform and also sets out a new way of integrating and delivering services in the early intervention space.

1. Population screening - identification of students at risk

Population screening is used combining data from a Student Needs Survey (SNS), completed by every student in a secondary school, with school-identified cases and a brief screening interview. The interview checks whether or not information about risk is valid and current and engages the student with TGP. Referrals to case management are then jointly decided between the TGP team and schools.

2. Flexible service delivery - a 3-tier response

A three-tier case practice framework is the foundation for effective and multi-disciplinary service responses to the range of needs in the at-risk population.

This case practice model developed so far aligns with the DHS Services Connect practice framework, and is underpinned by a youth-focused, family-centred approach. This model supports young people, their families, their schools and communities to address issues that left unresolved lead to youth homelessness and disengagement from education.

Young people can 'step up - step down' from one level of support to another, which from the client's perception is a seamless transition.

Tier 1.

Active monitoring by school staff, or a secondary consultation where a referral is made to another program or agency.

Tier 2.

Casework support, either a brief counselling-type of casework or case management by TGP

Tier 3.

'Wrap-around' case management for complex cases requiring the formal involvement of several agencies.

3. Outcomes/Evaluation

Individual outcomes for the project are specific (positive) changes in the attitudes, behaviours, knowledge and skills, relationships and functioning at home and at school that lead to remaining in school and in the family home.

Current Service System

A fragmented and poorly coordinated system

A program focus instead of a client focus

Services which fail to consider or respond to the family circumstances

A traditional welfare approach that focusses on crisis support and stabilisation

A focus on solving problems after they occur

No coordinated governance framework that operates across sectors

Traditional Response to vulnerable Young People

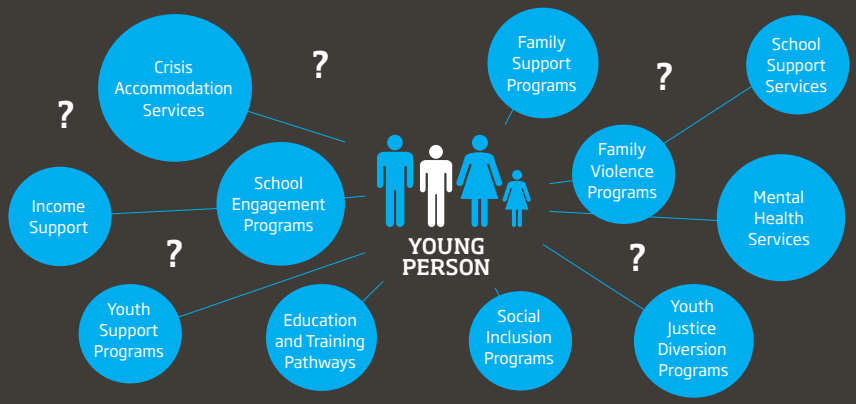
12 - 18 YO POPULATION

Vulnerable young person identified at point of crisis with multiple needs

Presenting Issues:
Family conflict, homelessness, family violence, school disengagement, social exclusion, mental health, contact with police, substance abuse, CALD, disability, health, sexuality, income, food security

Parental needs:
Parenting skills, Substance abuse, mental health, family violence, education and training

Over 100 potential program/ issue specific responses



In Geelong:

- 60% of young people reported that they did not know where to go for help (Geelong Better Youth Services Pilot Report - 2010)
- 17% of young people live in families where exposed to family conflict and poor family management (COGG - Adolescent Community Profile)
- 28% young people aged 19 have not achieved year 12 or equivalent

TGP - Community Early Intervention Platform

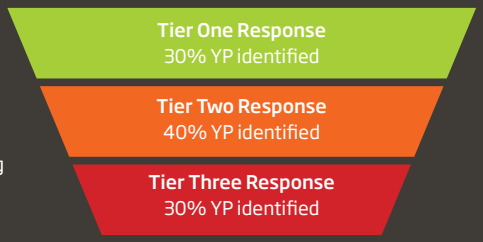
12 - 18 YO POPULATION

Systematic and proactive approach to identifying young people at risk prior to crisis

TGP - Community Early Intervention Platform: Single Point of Entry, Screening and Assessment across sectors

Youth Focused - Family Centred Assessment

Assesses level and types of support required for both young person and their family to address issues.



Tier One - low level of support

Tier Two - moderate level of support

Tier Three - high level of support

Integrated Early Intervention Services that responds to holistic needs

Integrated Services:

- Family Support
- School Support
- Homelessness Services
- Mental Health
- Substance Abuse
- Youth Justice Diversion
- Education and Training
- Youth Support Programs

Supported by:

- Formalised Partnerships
- Cross Sectoral data system
- Governance mechanisms
- Common practice framework
- Workforce development

Outcomes: In a trial period of 6 months and 95 young people and families - TGP has achieved:

- 100% success rate in keeping young people engaged in education and training
- 100% success rate in keeping young people safe and at home

What's required for change

- Population Screening to identify young people at-risk earlier (Student Needs Survey)
- Community Early Intervention Platform - Intake and Screening
- Community Early Intervention Platform - Key 'Youth and Family' Workers
- Governance and Partnerships development
- Data, Evaluation and Research Team
- E-wellbeing: Cross sectoral database
- Community Early Intervention Platform - workforce development

Investment

There has been a major public investment in the planning and development of TGP over more than five years. This has involved the contributions of hundreds of personnel from across the sector including homelessness, education disability, health, mental health, youth justice, child protection, drug and alcohol, family services, recreation cultural diversity and indigenous services. A huge personal investment from hundreds of people!

The developmental work has been possible through grants from Council of Homeless Persons, and FaHCSIA Homeless Research Partnerships, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Youth Partnerships program, and Swinburne University. A limited trial has been possible through project funding via DHS HIAP Homelessness Innovation Action Projects and Barwon Youth Partnerships. Funding over the last twelve months has been outstandingly successful.

The Project funds received through HIAP has now ceased. Government has invited TGP representatives to return with a proposal for a sustainable early intervention platform. The Geelong community partnership is keenly interested in how resources can be used more productively. TGP, together with schools and stakeholders, is developing a local proposal for a sustainable early intervention platform from a range of contributions. TGP is planning to go back to government in early 2014 seeking a 'whole of government' approach to early intervention because effective early intervention involves a cross-sectoral and across department approach.

The immediate concern is the need to maintain development and operations for the next six months while we negotiate a longer-term government contribution. TGP requires $250,000 to maintain this service. TGP is working with trusts, schools, partners, community service agencies, local members of parliament to develop ways to keep the program afloat while a sustainable early intervention platform is developed into the future.

How much does this work cost?

A major benefit of early intervention is the lifetime cost saving of preventing school drop-out and homelessness, including costs in health care, welfare and justice.

TGP is costed at $3,653 per family. This is a massive saving to the community when compared to the cost of homelessness and early school leaving, not to mention incarceration and untreated mental illness or perpetuation of family violence.

There is no doubt that the costs of intervention escalate as young people move further into the service system. However, as reported in the Australian Productivity Commission's annual reports of government services, detailing the costs of this is not a simple process.

Studies have found that young people who do not complete school are more likely to become unemployed, stay unemployed for extended periods of time, are more at risk of mental health problems, and are more likely to become engaged with the justice system

A recent report, *Lifecourse Institutional Costs of Homelessness for Vulnerable Groups* rigorously examined the lifecourse institutional costs of 11 cases in a sample who were aged between 23 and 55 at the time of the study, and found that their costs ranged from around $900,000 to $5.5 million, with the highest costs being associated with the youngest individual.

TGP is costed at $3653 per family. This is a massive saving to the community when compared to the cost of homelessness, early school leaving, incarceration, untreated mental illness or family violence.

Investment (continued)

The researchers observed "In almost every case discussed, significant disadvantage, vulnerability and risk factors are obvious from early adolescence. (Baldry et al 2012). Earlier Australian research, *The Economic Costs and Benefits of School-Based Early Intervention*, (Pinkney & Ewing 1998) estimated a potential long-term benefit of $474 million for one year of school-based early intervention. Most of the costs are due to the impact of educational disadvantage and the break-even point for this intervention would be where only one in five of the students are diverted from experiencing long-term homelessness and successfully complete secondary school.

Preliminary findings from the Australian Research Council (ARC) suggest that young people who experience homelessness incur nearly 15 times the cost to the justice system of young people in the general population and five time the health related costs of other young people .

Research being undertaken by Swinburne University to measure the benefit of reducing youth homelessness through TGP will contribute to Victoria's effort to make the benefits of earlier intervention clearer.

Short-term costs of homelessness:

- 6 weeks youth refuge crisis accommodation
  $7,051
  (City Limits Youth Refuge, Time For Youth)
- Unreasonable to live at home allowance
  $10,774
  (Centrelink payment)

Short-term costs of family breakdown:

- 12 months Out of Home Care
  $44,564
  (Productivity Commission (RoGS))

Short-term costs of youth offending:

- 12 months Community Supervision
  $39,772
  (Lifecourse study data)
- 12 month Custody
  $292,730
  (Lifecourse study data)

The lifecourse study did identify very high costs associated with studies of a sample of complex cases. One accumulated a life course cost of $900,000, another $5.5 million.

How will funding be used?

Following are the main categories for the funding being sought for work to continue over the next twelve months. Choosing one of these or a combination of more than one may fit within your organisation's funding parameters and current community strategies.

Surveys and screening across schools

This involves a systemic, replicable and scalable approach to proactive early identification of young people at risk. This also provides the basis for tracking to measure long term outcomes. Students across all state schools in Geelong have been surveyed using the Student Needs Survey (SNS) – a validated tool – developed by Swinburne University. Work to date has identified a large number of unsupported young people at high risk. Funding is required to continue to conduct and streamline the SNS so that we have near real time data on the at-risk population in order to offer timely support.

Help for young people

Early intervention work in the next phase will be built upon a small cross disciplinary team that has expertise in the areas of family services, mental health, juvenile justice, drug and alcohol services and homelessness. This work will be based on the 'youth focussed and family centred' approach that has proven to be so successful in the trial. It will be based around the three tiered response to young people and their family depending on the level of need and risk. For this phase, funding is sought to provide support to over 800 young people at risk across Geelong schools.

Governance

A partnership approach requires ongoing development of the partnerships across the sector, as well as workforce development, relationship building and engagement with indigenous and diversity groups.

Investment (continued)

Website development

The Geelong Project website together with social media connections, performs an important information sharing and education role in the Barwon community and more widely. There are many features to be developed to enable information and resource sharing for agencies and schools. This includes an expansion of the resources library; improved intranet functionality for agencies and schools to share research, best practice and electronic tools for screening and referral; improved information handling and a greater reach for communicating what is working in the area of early intervention.

E-Wellbeing and data system

This information system supports the data requirements of TGP in the longitudinal and cross-sectoral support it provides. The prototype is under development, and will include a case management data module for early intervention, a Student Mapping Tool to support schools actively monitoring at-risk students, a student support data module for school staff undertaking student support activities, a re-engineered Real Time Student dashboard, a community mapping tool of youth service entry and an electronic referral module.

Outcome Star Tool for early intervention

The Outcomes Star™ is an assessment made as part of the case management process, and is a model being adopted in Victoria to measure and support progress for service users towards self-reliance or other goals. A Homelessness Star exists, but the development of an Outcomes Star™ specific to early intervention for at-risk young people is needed.

Workforce Training and Development

This will engage the wider community of schools and services in developing an accredited training framework for professionals dealing with vulnerable young people in an early intervention context.

Brokerage funding

Brokerage funds are important in providing caseworkers with access to immediate small-scale funding for services that may help support a client in need in a timely way. This might include a gym membership, short course, or other activity that helps a young person to re-focus and get their life back on track.

Research and Evaluation

The Geelong Project was conceived from the outset as a 'research and development' venture that would take three years to implement fully the innovations embodied in the model. Further research, data collection and evaluation of outcomes is required to demonstrate a measurable impact on youth homelessness and early school leaving.

Co-location and lease or purchase of premises

TGP needs investment in premises and equipment to enable co-location of the core early intervention personnel (approximately 25 staff) and all early intervention components on the same site. TGP would benefit from a substantial capital contribution towards this important goal.

Communications and strategic development

As this is a lighthouse project, more work needs to be done to raise awareness of its aims at a local, state and national level. Funding for campaign development will help to convey the benefits more broadly and garner public support for TGP.

For more information or to make a contribution, visit thegeelongproject.com.au or contact us:

T. 03 5246 7500
E. thegeelongproject@timeforyouth.org

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The Geelong Project is led by Time for Youth (TfY) in partnership Barwon Youth, Swinburne University and the Geelong Local Learning & Employment Network with Geelong schools and community services. The project is totally committed to demonstrating that, through effective early intervention and by supporting young people to remain at home, to stay at school, and to be connected to their community, homelessness can be reduced in Australia.