

LEARNING CHOICES EXPO

Have we got what it takes?: The skills, rewards and recognition needed for teachers, youth workers and others in Learning Alternatives.

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What follows is drawn from the contributions of practitioners at two Dusseldorp convened events: a meeting in July 2003 that was the genesis for conducting the Learning Choices Expo in July 2004 and a session that I facilitated at the Expo entitled HAVE WE GOT WHAT IT TAKES? Thank you for your thoughtful contributions and in anticipation of your continuing enthusiasm for working with young people to help them to take control of their lives and to achieve success.

The conversation that I facilitated at the Expo was designed to address some questions specific to Alternate Settings that have puzzled us for some time. The questions were posed to gather your thoughts through collaborative table discussions about

- ◆ *Skills and pre-service training;*
- ◆ *Communication;*
- ◆ *Dealing with isolation;*
- ◆ *Rewards and recognition;*
- ◆ *Immediate professional development needs; and*
- ◆ *Ongoing professional learning.*

Background

The "we" in "Have we got what it takes?" refers to the teachers, the youth workers and others who might be involved in some way in enabling learning to occur in alternate learning settings to optimize success for the young people who learn best in such environments. Alternate from what? From the traditional mainstream settings offered by most schools where those who don't fit the mould are often marginalized. It is clear that the "one-size-fits-all-approach" to working with young people "in need" or "at risk", does not work. The clientele is very broad with a range of needs that require skilled teaching, counselling and life skill expertise. Specifically skills, knowledge and understanding that provide the type of assistance and support that will enthuse, encourage and inspire young people. From the range of ideas that we were privileged to see and hear about at the Expo it is also obvious that a range of flexible approaches must be:

- ◆ *Available, resourced, supported and respected;*
- ◆ *Not hidden, but valued as legitimate ways to educate young people; and*
- ◆ *Accountable for use of tax payer and/or sponsor dollars.*

So, who works in these alternate settings?

Our research reveals that people who work in such environments are often regarded as slightly mad, sometimes subversive, somewhat "alternative" themselves and oft times charismatic to young people. We also found that they are dedicated and passionate about helping young people. Most are putting their heart and soul into supporting and protecting young people to find themselves and experience success.

Such teachers and youth workers have

- ◆ *respect for their students and for their peers;*
- ◆ *a desire to be with adolescents and genuinely like young people;*
- ◆ *make strident attempts to understand (?) current youth culture;*
- ◆ *recognise the need to be authentic and offer real learning experiences; and*
- ◆ *possess self-knowledge, good listening skills and sensitivity*

It is also evident that they are self-starters - capable of developing their own programs with links to student lives and the needs they present with or that emerge along the way. What

¹ The ANSN is a not-for-profit organisation that is a collaborative network of schools, teacher unions, tertiary education faculties, individuals and government and non-government systems and sectors. Members benefit from being part of a national network of educators, schools, systems, unions, universities and business partners - developing and accessing support and information, fostering connections between people and schools nationally and internationally, conducting innovative school-based research, providing professional learning opportunities for teachers, and influencing education policy. Visit www.ansn.edu.au

makes it tricky and quite difficult is that they also see themselves as "gatekeepers". By this I mean that they feel a desperate need to protect their programs, their students and their "patch". The itinerant nature of their work (at times temporary, often casual), based on funding cycles that may or may not see their programs continue, causes considerable stress and as a result they often burnout!

It is apparent that the teachers and youth workers live in the hope that decent pay and non-wage rewards, such as structured time out and a creative balance of stress, enjoyment and professional rewards are possible.....because like most people they respond to a sound and stimulating work culture and environment. Perhaps joint union advocacy may help.

We have also found through the extensive work of New Zealander John Hattie, in a paper entitled **Teachers Make a Difference – What is the research evidence?** (ACER 2003) that teachers provide the major source of variance in student achievement other than the students themselves. Teachers account for 30% of the variance. "It is what teachers know, do and care about which is very powerful in [the] learning equation" (See Diagram 1). This breakdown from Hattie's research (a synthesis of 500,000 studies of the effects of the influences on student achievement) is solid evidence that providing students with 'expert' teachers is an integral key to improving education outcomes. Our young people deserve no less. There is a responsibility to provide the conditions (pre-service training, on-going PD, professional support, remuneration etc) that will encourage such people into teaching and youth work careers and further to provide them with reasons and the support for them to stay.

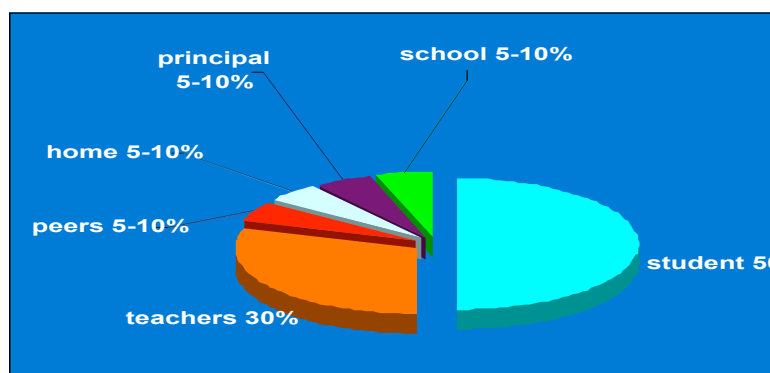


Diagram 1 Influences on student achievement (percentage variance) Hattie 2003

If teachers contribute to 30% of the variance in student achievement it is here that we can have significant influence in the learning process. What does it look like in Alternate Settings?

And so to your answers to the questions.....

- 1. What special skills are required by those who work with young people in alternate settings? What are the implications for pre-service training for both teachers and youth workers?**

In addition to the skills mentioned above, Expo participants identified the following "special skill set" as requirements for those teaching and working in this area. The skills fall into categories that are inextricably linked to each other:

- ◆ teaching and learning,
- ◆ counselling and caring;
- ◆ managing and resourcing.

Teaching and learning

Teachers and youth workers need to like kids in this age group and want to work with them to achieve a measure of success and to realise satisfaction from their work. It is critical that they understand the learning needs of adolescents and the way that young people think and learn. There is much written about this in the area of middle schooling (ACSA 1998). To teach in these settings it is deemed important to possess broad general curriculum knowledge comprising a mix of expertise in literacy and numeracy, life skills and personal development as well as practical skills that might help to develop employability skills (eg trade and sales skills). It is also necessary to be flexible with ability to offer authentic and real learning opportunities. Ideally reflective practitioners are employed who have an awareness of current best practice and how to adapt or modify it to suit local conditions. The reality, given the

prevailing working conditions, is often far removed from this and those with theoretical and pedagogical expertise can find easier less stressful positions elsewhere in the system. The best and most experienced don't stay long, there's not profile here, no opportunity for promotion, not career structure. So practitioners who are "where the rubber hits the road" are the stayers, or the new kids on the block., but they recognise the importance of being willing and able to engage young people at an "affective level" as a priority over a "cognitive only" approach at least as a starting point. They recognise that a journey begins with the first step.....

Counselling and caring

Of importance too are those communication skills that allow trust to manifest. A significant number of young people seeking support are homeless, have drug (legal and illegal) problems, are in trouble with the law, come from dysfunctional families, have suffered abuse both physical and emotional, may suffer from or be candidates for depression and other mental illness. In addition they may have learning difficulties that could have resulted from irregular attendance, truancy, and transition from place to place and inability to relate to someone who has time to care and or understand their situation. None of these issues can or should be taken lightly. Each requires skill and sensitivity to manage. Such issues require dignified and respectful ways of working. Put this way the task of working with young people can be quite overwhelming. Many young people have been helped "through" by the caring support of multi-skilled "teachers" in these alternate settings. It is also important to recognise that there are many in our communities who are "teachers". Not all have teaching qualifications, but many have important lessons to impart and sometimes it is likely that those without the qualification are better able to relate to young people "in need". We should not discount the importance of their contribution to this needy group in our midst.

Information and advice must be offered in such a way that help is acceptable to young people and that they are motivated and supported over time to get on top of their issues. Having good community contacts or having the capacity to develop them or seek appropriate interventions are key ingredients for working in this area eg knowledge of 'the systems' (eg Centre Link, DOCS, Juvenile Justice) and how to access it and the wherewithal to encourage persistence and the courage not to give up when confronted with the red tape and tough times.

Managing and resourcing

Resilience is a personal quality that is advantageous in this type of work. Other skills that are integral to these roles include being innovative and flexible, having high level interpersonal qualities, leadership, management and networking skills. Skills to write submissions for funding, negotiate conditions and complete evaluation reports would appear necessary since acquiring and maintaining funding to resource their settings takes considerable time and energy. School-based settings struggle to validate their high level staffing points on a constant basis and the chase for funds to pay staff, provide equipment and purchase consumables, make improvements and provide for an increasing number of young people seeking support, is a constant in community centres. Few centres, it appears, have permanent funding. The insecurity of resourcing leads to cyclic ups and downs for these learning settings since few staff have full-time permanent positions and casual and contract staff come and go. This leads to inconsistency for students and lack of continuity in relationships. For many this is the only stable part of their life – so this in itself is problematic since trust takes time to build. Often where centres are attached to schools interest by the principal and administration is oblique and the centres, students, staff and achievements are kept hidden away from visitors and parents "down the back" It is difficult for staff to feel valued in such circumstances. Burnout is frequent – staff 'casualties' from the stress of working with very needy young people in difficult circumstances takes its toll. Stress management and counselling support should be made available at regular debriefings for staff members. Since teachers and youth workers are paid different rates. There appears little equity and limited respect.

Pre-service Training

It was strongly recommended that an accredited pre-service training course for workers in an alternative educational setting be established. The training must focus on the skills outlined above and allow and encourage pre-service practise in a broad range of teaching areas (TAFE, business, youth centres, schools) and include a qualification that is recognised and valued by education systems and the community sector. Courses should include knowledge of historical and current youth culture and issues and exposure to culture work placement and opportunities for shadowing experience and opportunities gain first-hand knowledge the complexity and diversity in the system. There is a need to broaden traditional models and ideas of learning and who is qualified to deliver and teach in these settings. This is an imperative if we are to attract workers to this area for more than short term stints, leaving when the stress and pressure of such work gets the better of them and they move on for health reasons..... usually leaving a vacuum.

It was also suggested that establishing a selection criteria for entry into teaching might include personal attributes and suitability as opposed to as University Admission Index (UAI) score. Such attributes might include demonstrated or potential

- ◆ *Resilience*
- ◆ *Flexibility*
- ◆ *Creativity*
- ◆ *Empathy*
- ◆ *Consistency*
- ◆ *Ability to inspire*
- ◆ *Integrity*
- ◆ *Humour*
- ◆ *Proven commitment to youth development*

Would you be hurrying to work each day if your motivators were: low pay with poor work conditions, limited resources and short term, tentative contracts, no career path, and constant pressure of losing funding, teaching young people who have been excluded from schools that are reasonably resourced with a team of teachers and support workers, and a principal who are all reasonably paid with career paths and good work conditions! And you spend your day working at the most challenging levels with young people with a range of issues from learning disabilities, ADHD and all its relatives, low literacy and numeracy, abuse, rape, drug use, depression, mental illness, eating disorders, pregnancy, anger, hatred, cultural bias, racism, family dysfunction and criminal records And then there are the attempted suicides and the fallout when someone in our care is successful. Welcome to my world!" Youth worker.

2. To lessen the isolation experienced by many in alternate settings who else should you be connected with that may assist/support you? How do you imagine this might occur?

Developing meaningful connections

Expo participants suggested that isolation was indeed a stressor in their work. As previously mentioned burn out is a significant factor leading to high staff turnover and the changes to staff are unsettling for young people seeking help. Adding to the sense of being alone is the unprofessional behaviour of some colleagues. It was reported that some workers in alternate settings experienced being ostracised - being spoken at, down to and talked about as not being "real" teachers. This in addition to working with difficult, often impatient young people who demand a don't-tell-anyone environment. The strain of keeping confidences is also stressful. These factor, along with the physical isolation eg "down the back of the school, hidden" lead to concerning professional isolation.

Participants suggested that meaningful connections should be fostered and developed between service providers, community organisations and their leaders, other educators (peers), cultural/indigenous groups and other professional associations that may offer appropriate links and support. However having to deal with a range of different regulatory bodies where at times the requirements appear to conflict increases the complexity. Needs

will vary from centre to centre, but it is clear that the relationships across the board take time to generate and maintain. Mentors and critical friends may be of value here.

Establishing local 'learning choices' networks

It was strongly suggested and thought highly appropriate to create local, regional, state and national networks to support and advocate the needs and contributions of the young people and staff. At all levels these networks could link to each other and share ideas via a website maintained by Dusseldorp that is accessible by all and provide information and links to best practice and an on-line community of practice. This networking ought also to include face-to-face meetings (around geographical clusters), state seminars and an annual forum like to Learning Choices Expo 2004. Of course any such network is as good as those who make it up and willingness to actively participate and keep it buoyant. Another suggestion was the creation of a National Coordinating Body with Federal funding, formed to enhance and promote these ideas and continue the connections made at the Expo. This body might also take on an advocacy role to establish a way forward and to generate funding for research in this area.

Efforts should be made and time taken to raise the public profile to enhance the image of this sector of education and community work, to change public perception, to attract corporations, sponsors and other parties to this "cause". Positive marketing could be undertaken at public events to help promote alternatives as "OK" with a rightful and valid place in our communities. Alternative settings might also be reconceptualised as 'learning choices' in the mainstream. It was suggested that the department of education and organisations where the clients originate should take responsibility for this promotional work.

Documenting practice and establishing a research base

There was general agreement that Australian research in this area is lacking or not immediately available or known about. It was also agreed that additional research must be undertaken including action research and longitudinal studies. The main aim here is to use the results to influence policy and ideally have an effect on the manner and degree to which practical implementation is resourced, viewed and respected. Responsibility for on-the-ground research might rest with practitioners with a coordinator to manage a research circle process in the first instance as a pilot with departmental support (equity programs). The Australian National Schools Network (ANSN) and Dusseldorp Skills Forum (DSF) might work in partnership to get this pilot off the ground if funding were available.

3. How should teachers, youth workers and others in alternate settings be rewarded and recognised?

Everyone wants to know when they do something well. Each of us needs to be recognised as an individual and as part of a larger group. We all have an innate desire to be valued and to know why. We want to be recognised and rewarded.

There are several types of recognition that are applicable in alternate settings. Teachers and youth workers need and deserve recognition of their professional standing and not made to feel "less than". They want to be valued for their contribution inside the schools and community settings where they work and beyond with system and departmental bodies. A good start would be a principal who knows their names and invites them for coffee to talk about their work, the ideas they have for improvement and about their students' work. They are perturbed and dissatisfied being hidden, while persevering behind the scenes to make progress (albeit sometimes limited) through hard work with needy adolescents, the majority of whom are unacknowledged as part of our communities. Granted that many of these young people may be dirty and unkempt, they may be illiterate but streetwise, they may have histories the like of which most of us would desperately like to exclude, but their plight is real. And the teachers and youth workers who take the time, have the patience, the zeal, to build relationships with them and encourage them (sometimes kicking and screaming) to make something of themselves should be treated with dignity and respect. For these kids they are heroes. They need recognition to survive, since their wages don't really remunerate adequately or compensate for the out-of-hours effort and the heavy weight of life stories that are desperate and often sad - no overtime here! Few qualified counsellors operate in these neighbourhoods. Work in the not-for-profit sector where charity funding pays their bills is not

for the faint hearted. And few corporate tycoons stroll in the backstreets looking for centres to sponsor.

They also have a right to working conditions that are equivalent to others in the profession. Their teaching areas and classrooms are less than adequate in many instances, their opportunities to create stimulating learning environments constrained. Many have no access to technology that others in the same systems take for granted – email access would be a boon!

They also need a career structure. The itinerant nature of their work and the vagueness that surrounds the funding of their centres in all honesty has little appeal. Who do you know that would work in such circumstances? What is there to aspire to? To move up means to move on, and so, they are replaced by rookies, who eventually wise up and leave too. Departments of Education and Community Services must act now to address this situation.

Expo participants wanted recognition:

- ◆ for themselves as individuals – this includes all who work in this field: teachers, youth workers, community and church-based workers,
- ◆ for them as a group of contributors to society - credibility
- ◆ for their work – a higher profile and mainstream acknowledgement
- ◆ for their settings – not "down the back" but upfront (and perhaps personal!)
- ◆ for their students – to acknowledge their struggle and tell their stories of achievement. Celebrate with them. Provide students with formal recognition of achievements in alternative programs eg, map programs against VET competencies/school curriculum

Departments of Education, Community Services and the other government bodies responsible have a role to play here. No longer can they ostrich-like put their collective heads in the sand. Instead of "dumping" on youth they must take up the challenge to provide the resources and the stability that are really necessary to make a difference. Results will not unfold overnight. Miracles occur on occasion. And outcomes are not likely to be measured by the numbers of HSC achievers – not many here – rather the fact that someone is now "clean", and someone else has attended for 3 weeks and another has an job interview on Friday and another is willing to start again..... Measure what is of value. The process, like school reform, like environmental sustainability is never-ending but it is necessary to start, to persist. Ignoring the situation does not make it disappear.

So what rewards might be appropriate. If equality and equity are the norm, then exactly the same rewards that are available to all schools and community groups at regional, state and national levels and specific to this sector of education should be available eg Teacher of the Year, Youth Worker of the Year, Program of the Year, Students of the year; Teams (students and staff) of the Year etc. Celebrate the achievements with monetary scholarships, interstate and regional study tours, professional development, time allocations for research, critical friend and mentor support etc. Acknowledgement in the form of awards sends a positive message about the importance of this area of education. It also sends a message to the teachers and the students in these settings – that they are worthy, that they count, that we recognise them!

4. How might communication be enhanced between teachers, youth workers and others in alternate settings, and with those external to the school/alternate setting eg, systems and other authorities?

Communication is an integral element of keeping connected and suggestions link closely to what was put forward about reducing isolation. The ideas of developing a network (a community of practice), developing and maintaining a webpage and using a discussion list to shape a community of practice, holding local cluster meetings, state seminars and a national annual conference are some ideas floated (see Q 2).

Having a **common language** for communicating would improve information sharing, liaising and negotiating between centres. Often it appears that the language (jargon) used by agencies and education cause divisions that could be overcome if they talked the same

language and developed some protocols for operating in the sector. eg clear understanding of roles/responsibilities; clear and unified understanding of program goals; and use a common language with which all stakeholders are familiar, to communicate with those beyond the sector. In this way ambiguities will be lessened and sense of purpose will help grow the network.

A communication strategy

Initially steps in developing a communication strategy might require answering such questions as:

1. *Why do we want to communicate? (purpose).*
2. *Who wants to be involved? Everyone? Some? At what level?*
3. *How will we communicate?*
4. *How often and for how long? (A trial? A pilot?)*
5. *Who will maintain a website and a discussion list? What will we discuss?*
6. *How will we know if it's working? What will we do if it isn't working?*
7. *How will we evaluate the benefits or otherwise?*

Some thoughts on "Why" communicate (purpose)

- ◆ *To connect with each other. There is likely a formal channel (eg meetings, seminars conferences, a website) and a less formal channel to float ideas, ask questions, seek advice etc (eg email discussion list, cluster meetings combined with a social gathering)*
- ◆ *To nurture advocates and demonstrate capacity to lobby for support and to look for opportunities to develop partnerships with those who can support, help, resource and champion the "cause". Who has come from this background and made good? Tell their stories. Better still have them tell their stories. Write positive stories/articles. Gain positive media attention for the right reasons (sponsors shy away very quickly from poor press). Phone talk back radio and "value add" (selected spokespersons?). Be pro-active not re-active.*
- ◆ *To promote and develop a mechanism for sharing ideas, programs and ways of working within settings and across the school; beyond settings with other teachers in other settings; and beyond education to other community members, agencies and groups.*
- ◆ *To develop a way of working that has some consistency across the sector including decision-making mechanisms that are known and understood.*

Some thoughts on "What" to communicate about?

Perhaps:

- ◆ *Buddies and mentors, critical friends, professional supervision*
- ◆ *Setting up of a community liaison team in each school or group of schools/centres whose core business is connecting schools, community, agencies and young people, and their learning (both internally and externally). This could be the makings of a valuable research project.*
- ◆ *Development of a directory of services (web-based with search facility) that is updated annually.*
- ◆ *The opportunities that working together might mean rather than competing for limited funding.*
- ◆ *Large stakeholders being open to smaller groups to residing together*
- ◆ *What's available through in youth research, contacts, book reviews, good websites to visit, program successes? Teaching strategies etc etc.*
- ◆ *Full-service schools models - visit working models, read the research - inter-agency co-operation and co-location, sharing resources.*

Who might be responsible?

Responsibility ultimately lies with everyone, since communication to be worth the time needs active participants with a shared purpose and who are willing to collaborate with colleagues to improve practice. The development of a professional learning community is based in open communication and reflective practice.

Departments of Education and Community Services have an obligation to keep connected with their employees, and with technology connecting with each other must be made accessible to all workers in this sector. The Dusseldorp Skills Forum has already played a key role in

providing a website where programs are outlined and perhaps they might be willing to set up a discussion list.

The forming of a network might also begin with Dusseldorp and later through membership fees, become self sustaining. This is something to communicate about!

6. What are the on-going professional developments needs of teachers and youth workers in alternate settings ie, long term (over 1-3 years)?

There was unanimous agreement that the professional development that focuses on enabling teachers to be responsive to meet students' needs was an on-going necessity. With increasing responsibilities of schools to meet the needs of **all** students it is obligatory that appropriate PD experiences are available for both teachers and youth workers to attend together. They need opportunities to explore current best practice and make sense of them for their own contexts and develop new ideas and new approaches.

With the turn over in centres it is likely that PD needs are constant and courses such as those listed below might be offered on a regular basis. Regardless, the professional development that is offered must be designed to sustain teachers long after the end of the first adrenalin rush. Opportunities for teachers to be involve in action research in their own context for their own purposes, where they and their students reap the rewards and benefit from the results have considerable merit.

A list of PD needs include:

- Looking at Student work for evidence of learning - pedagogy
- Research - the how to of action research, report writing and evaluations.
- Writing for publications – journals, websites, sharing learning journeys
- Mentoring – what does it look like from both sides
- Advocacy – what does this mean for my centre, for the bigger picture?
- Resourcing – what's available to meet the needs of our clientele
- Networking – the skills necessary to communicate and work in teams across boundaries
- Liaising with communities and other agencies
- Case management – what's the best approach and how to keep records, including disclosures
- Sourcing money – submission writing, applying for grants, managing the funds.
- Best practice – what does this mean? What works? Visits and study tours
- Leadership
- Student assessment and competencies
- Life skills – what's best to teach in limited time
- Employability skills – current thinking on the skills needed today
- Youth culture – making meaning
- Understanding/recognising learning difficulties and how to work with students with ADHD, dyslexia, etc
- Sex education and personal development for today's youth
- Drug education
- Health issues for adolescents
- Youth pregnancy – motherhood and fatherhood
- Counselling – working with at risk behaviours
- Senior First Aid – compulsory for all
- Cutting the red tape and crap – the nitty gritty of working with government agencies (Centre Link, Docs, Family services, Police, Juvenile Justice)
- Student rights and Teacher Obligations (Duty of Care)
- Skills based training – practical
- Registered Training Organisation (RTO) –what does it take to become a provider?
- Managing compassion burnout and stress
- Inter-agency connections and community liaison
- Enterprise education
- Relationship building with students and the community

- Career planning (including superannuation and financial planning advice)
- Building of partnerships for sustainability of programs
- Professional support, mechanisms through mentoring and professional supervision

Who's responsibility?

There is an obvious desire to have such courses available and a range of providers might be available to offer the above. Some should be provided by the departments that employ workers in this sector and ought to be free of charge. Other courses with fees should be accessed by teachers through PD funding at schools or workplaces and other might be funded by individuals. Private providers such as DSF and ANSN may offer courses which are designed specifically to meet the needs of a particular group of centres. TAFE and Community College courses may also meet some needs. Courses paid for privately may be eligible to be claimed as a tax deduction

5. What are the immediate professional development needs of teachers and youth workers in alternate settings ie, short term (in next 6-12months)

Immediate professional development needs relate largely to meeting the needs of teachers and youth workers to help young people to learn develop relationships and work with others. As well, in order to look after themselves and deal with stress, isolation and communication issues, and avoid burnout personal PD is high on the agenda.

PD needs for teaching and learning

Strategies and tools for engaging and retaining all young people in learning program

- Individual development plans (IDP's) for students
- Project based learning and authentic assessment
- Identifying individual learning needs and styles
- A range of experiences and exposures to other ways of working eg youth off the streets or Boys from the bush

Developing learning opportunities that incorporate elements of control, meaning and bonding

- Crisis intervention
- Knowledge of treatments - drugs violence, substance abuse
- Dealing with homelessness

The creation of a learning community that we can access information on:

- Learning about local resources and how to use them
- Skills knowledge and curriculum development
- Cooperative learning strategies and habits of mind

PD needs for self preservation

Caring for teachers' and youth worker's welfare

- Stress management
- Codes for coping - building professional parachutes
- Focus on fun - where is the laughter?
- Buddy systems - mentoring for each other

Who is responsible?

These short term professional development needs are likely to be the responsibility of the school system and school principals, local government authorities, sponsoring body (eg church group or community organisation). Because there is a sense of urgency for teachers to quickly get on top of their responsibilities in these settings, the types of courses listed here are likely to be of a shorter duration than those listed in the on-going professional development section in answer to question 6. There is however a necessity for these needs to be taken seriously, so that those working in this area believe their needs are equally important as those who work in other areas of the school or the community. If local network/regional networks/state networks are developed it is likely that teachers will feel better supported and more able to capably and confidently work with young people in need and at risk.

Conclusion

In a time when teachers and schools are being blamed for many of societies ills and the behaviour of young people are (so the media tells us) the cause. It is vital that alternative settings

- ◆ *Are supported at policy level;*
- ◆ *Are resourced with appropriately trained staff who are:*
 - *Equitably remunerated;*
 - *Professionally supported including debriefing/counselling;*
 - *Recognised and valued; and*
 - *Provided professional development to meet their on-going needs.*
- ◆ *Are provided with the equipment and resources necessary; and*
- ◆ *Are able to offer flexibility around working hours and conditions.*

Our challenge is to convince policy makers and that the present system is failing our young people (not all, but enough) and that we need the freedom to try something different, and the flexibility to build a culture of learning for young people in which the employees too can thrive.

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