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Sandman engineering promotional vehicle at Bundaberg State High School careers day.

CREATING CAREERS through Life Skills Education

What Employees Want

I often have business people contact me at Youth Excel in the hope of finding an 'employable' young person for a vacant job position. As I stop to ask them what type of young person they are seeking, their responses are surprisingly similar. Below are responses from employers I have spoken to recently:

"I can teach a kid anything except how to have a good attitude and work ethic. I find most young people don't know how to work hard anymore. I didn't get good grades at school, but I knew how to work hard and take the opportunities I was given. I am really looking for a young person with a good attitude more than anything else."

Dennis Rand, Fianza Bathrooms and Tiles – Business Owner

"Getting along with people counts a lot in my business. As a hairdresser you really need to be able to make people feel special and have a listening ear. Personality counts for a lot because people come back for the conversation just as much as the haircut."

Jamie, Jack Hannah Studios - Aspley Store Manager

"I want a young person who is reliable. I can't afford to be looking over my shoulder to see if the job is done right all the time."

Paul Sampson, Rehau - State Manager

Youth Excel's Response

Successful careers don't magically begin when a young person receives their first job opportunity. They don't just happen for a few lucky students who are in the right place at the right time. Successful careers develop progressively, over a period of time. They begin with the student themselves developing the 'skills' and 'support networks' they need to

successfully transition into the workforce. As educators, we can play a major role in assisting students to develop these two ingredients by offering a quality Life Skills Education program.

Youth Excel has written a set of five programs, titled 'The Excel Series', which aims to offer students such Life Skills opportunities. The Excel Series aims to develop employability skills through teaching foundational life skills progressively from years 8 – 12. Together the programs offer a format that builds on key concepts and experiences each year. Each program's subject matter has been chosen to correspond to the most common needs of young people in that year level.

These subjects include:

- Self-esteem (Suggested year 8 program);
- Relating to authority (Suggested year 9 program);
- Problem-solving (Suggested year 10 program);
- Goal-setting (Suggested year 11 program);
- Self-leadership (Suggested year 12 program).

Unlike many other valuable resources, The Excel Series have refrained from focusing on specific issues such as bullying, self-harm, drugs or body image. We have found that focusing on general Life Skills adequately allows for young people to address the specific issues they are facing. The programs are relevant to all students as they provide foundational life skills that can be applied to any student's challenges.

To date, 'The Excel Series' has produced successful outcomes when implemented in accordance with the program's suggested delivery methods. In trials, the programs have been evaluated the following aims. The program aims to see students:

- Apply life skills strategies to their life;
- Develop work-readiness skills;
- Establish support networks that could extend beyond the duration of the program;
- Increase awareness of thoughts, feelings and chosen behaviour;
- Discover language to express thoughts, feelings and chosen behaviour.

The programs are timely in their response to DEST's Blue Print for Careers and may act as a part of any school's career development plan. They correspond to Certificates I and II in Work Readiness which make them ideal for flexible learning programs.

The Value of Mentoring

Jessica Talbot, Life Coaching client of Youth Excel

Ideally Life Skills are caught on a daily basis through observation and practice, rather than lectured in a formal environment. A student's opportunity to 'catch' life skills varies depending on their upbringing and key influencers. To increase and encourage student's ability to 'catch' life skills, The Excel Series incorporates mentoring.

As part of the student's homework, young people are required to choose a mentor who, for the duration of the program, will spend 20 minutes per week discussing the Home Journal Tasks with them. A mentor is someone who fits the following criteria:

- Already plays a positive role in the young person's life or the life of other young people
- Has never intentionally harmed the young person or another young person

- Is mature enough to give sound advice (18 plus).

As a safety precaution, parents or guardians are asked to sign off on the young person's choice of support person.

We have found that students most commonly choose a parent to fulfill this role. We have also found that often strained parent-teen relationships have been improved through this structured communication time. Students have also been challenged to identify and access support networks available to them, when they may have not otherwise chosen to.

Mentors are critical in any young person's success. They provide an incidental teaching component to the program and help young people recognize how to apply life skills principles to their own lives. Mentors may be family or community members, and may also include professionals, who can be accessed on a 'needs be' basis. A young person's support network may include an older sibling, parent, youth support co-ordinator, psychologist and employer. Each one of these mentors plays a unique role in that student's life.

The Excel Series in Use

The different ways that schools have chosen to use 'The Excel Series' are wide and varied. Below are examples of how the programs are being used:

Life Skills Lessons Year 8 - 12

Many State and Non-Government Schools have adopted 'The Excel Series' as part of their whole school Careers and Personal Development program. The programs have been chosen because of their contemporary graphics, easy to use format and whole school approach. 'The Excel Series' is most commonly delivered during one lesson per week over an eight week period. This enables 'The Excel Series' to be completed over one term and allows three other terms for additional Life Skills programs.

Mueller College, 2005 Careers

Day utilizing Discovering Dreams Program.

Boys Education for those 'at risk'
Marsden State High School –
Extract from reference supplied by Donna Harvey (Deputy Principal)

Marsden SHS is located in the low socio economic area of Logan City. Our students experience a range of life challenges including diverse cultural backgrounds, family dysfunction, learning disability, behaviour problems and health and diet issues. Marsden SHS employs Youth Excel to deliver The Excel Series for years 8 and 9 students identified "at risk" of disconnecting with education. These group mentoring programs are based on the themes of self esteem, problem solving and relationships.

Because of their success this year, we intend to benchmark the program through our Student and Community Service Facility. As part of this evaluation, parents will be interviewed to see if they have experienced the same level of change as we have at school. Even without formal evaluation, we could see the program had been highly successful because of the students' comments and behaviour changes. By the third week we were noticing that young people were:

- very excited about the weekly program and ensuring they were at school early
- recognizing the value of the program and respecting its value by looking after their workbooks and Home Journals
- speaking highly of the Youth Excel team throughout the week
- applying strategies they were being taught that was resulting in less escalations at school.

The most outstanding outcome we have noticed is students' ability to approach and use networks within the school. Students are now able to go to staff when they need time out and

ask for assistance to cool down or divert behaviour. This has tangibly lowered the escalations within the school and students are self monitoring in order to stay out of the 'planning room'.

Rural Australia - Indigenous Flexible Learning Program

Youth Excel, in conjunction with St George SHS and The Spot Youth Centre, is set to pilot a flexi program for Indigenous students in Term 3 of 2006. Youth Excel's programs have been identified as relevant and applicable to student's vocational needs and will be taught in conjunction with aboriginal dance, music creation workshops, outdoor education, budgeting, nutrition, work experience and learning associated with Certificate II in Work Readiness.

School Staff Delivery

'The Excel Series' may be delivered by youth service providers, such as Youth Excel, or by school staff. If delivered by school staff, teacher feedback has emphasised the importance of using enthusiastic and willing teachers to deliver the programs, providing thorough in-service and effective administrative procedures. Teachers have also highlighted the value of introducing the programs in year 8. A strong referral system should enable teachers to refer students to school based and external professionals when appropriate.

Contact

Youth Excel is a youth service provider and publishing house which exists to equip young people between the ages of 12 – 25 with the life strategies and motivation they need to reach their potential.

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