



# Darebin Under 16 Project

## Improving Education Engagement

December 2012



## **Acknowledgements**

This report has been prepared by Peter Kellock from The Asquith Group on behalf of the Youth Connections Consortium and the Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network Inc.

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- Andrew Horgan- Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network

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## Contents

Contents .....	3
Executive Summary .....	4
Introduction.....	4
Project Aims.....	5
Project Scope .....	5
Research Findings.....	5
Contributing Factors .....	7
Data Collection Issues.....	7
Re-engagement – What Works .....	8
Recommendations.....	9
The Darebin Under 16 Project .....	11
Introduction.....	11
Profile of the City of Darebin .....	13
Attendance at school.....	17
Disengagement from school .....	19
Case Studies .....	24
Factors contributing to disengagement .....	28
What would help young people re-engage?.....	30
Services to support young people in Darebin .....	32
Summary of Findings.....	37
References.....	41
Attachment 1 – Non School Agency Data Collection .....	42
Attachment 2 – School Data Collection.....	44
Attachment 2 – School Data Collection.....	44
Attachment 3 – Structured Interview Format, Young Parents and Parents .....	47

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The Darebin Under 16 Project is a joint initiative between the Youth Connections Program (NMIT is the Lead Agent) and the Inner Northern LLEN.

The City of Darebin covers the suburbs of Alphington, Bundoora, Fairfield, Kingsbury, Macleod, Northcote, Preston, Thornbury and Reservoir. Young people in the City of Darebin aged 10-15 years make up 16.3 % of the Darebin population, which is a low percentage compared with the average youth component of the total population across other Melbourne LGAs of 18.5%. Almost 35% of the population of Darebin was born overseas.

Darebin has reasonably strong levels of educational attainment among young people under 16 years. 2008 ABS data shows that 5.6% of students in Darebin had left school in Year 10 or below, while a further 10% did not indicate their level of attainment. The Melbourne Statistical Division (MSD) average for students leaving school at Year 10 or below was 27.9%.

However, despite the strong and improving level of educational attainment by young people in Darebin, there appear to be a number of quite young people who remain disengaged from the education system.

The implementation of the Youth Connections Program from 2010 reinforced concerns in the community about the extent of poor educational outcomes and engagement for young people in this age group.

In general the best place for young people is at school, and disadvantaged youth are the least connected to schools. However, this group will likely stay on only if appropriate programs are offered. Recent government reforms to TAFE means it is likely that disadvantaged groups may not have the capacity to access TAFE programs, and are not being catered for in school.

The higher a school's academic performance and focus, the greater the pressure on the least advantaged students. Disadvantaged youth are often further disadvantaged by the growing affluence of their communities, as this group finds it increasingly difficult to access fewer programs.<sup>1</sup>

The Darebin Under 16 Project was undertaken to gain an understanding of the extent of disengagement in Darebin, and to develop informed responses to the issue.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: NIEIR 2009, p 102, citing Research by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum

## **Project Aims**

The Darebin Under 16 Project aimed to:

- identify the number of young people under 16 years of age in the City of Darebin who are disengaged from school, education and training;
- assess the forms of support available to these young people; and
- develop recommendations for a strategy to re-engage them.

This report has been developed to provide this information to key government departments (particularly Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and Australian Government Department of Human Services, school staff (particularly principals and senior managers) relevant community organisations, and to local government.

## **Project Scope**

The project focussed on young people in Darebin aged between 10 and 16 years who were either:

- completely disengaged; or
- whose school attendance did not exceed three or four days a week, indicating a potential for disengagement.

## **Research Findings**

The research is based on 2011 data collected from local schools, agencies, young people and families in Darebin using a combination of existing studies, surveys and interviews.

The data relates to government schools in Darebin involving six government secondary schools.

The research findings summarised below are detailed in the body of the report.

A total enrolment in government secondary schools in Darebin for those under 16 years in 2011 is estimated at approximately 2288 young people. Of this group research indicates that:

### **Many young people under the age of 16 attend school on an irregular basis.**

Schools reported that:

- 4.1% (94 young people) are missing one day of school each week on average (40+ days per year)
- 1.1% (26 young people) are missing more than two days of school each week (80+ days per year)

- As a result, a total of 5.2% (120 young people) in Darebin are missing from school at least an average of one day a week

By comparison, in Years 7 to 10, the Victorian average for days of non-attendance in 2010 was 19.7 days and across the Hume region, in 2010 was 21.2 days.

**An additional number of young people under 16 years have completely disengaged from school.**

- 17 young people in the age group were reported by agencies operating in Darebin as having been in contact during 2011.
- Of these 17 young people, 9 were reported as not attending school at all.
- The young people accessing the services were predominantly male and from English speaking backgrounds.
- Government schools reported having expelled eight young people under the age of 16, and a further six had been still enrolled but were unable to be contacted.

**In total there were 129 young people aged under 16 in Darebin attending school irregularly or not at all.**

**The majority of those young people completely disengaged from school appear to be aged 14 and 15 years old.**

- This is consistent with Victoria Police and Juvenile Justice data where the majority of contact occurs from age 13 onwards.
- A few are completely disengaged at 11, but it is at 14 years old that the numbers begin to increase.
- Patterns of irregular attendance often commence early in primary school years.
- A standard period of complete school disengagement in this age group lasts between 18 to 24 months
- Multiple instances of school disengagement in the one family are not uncommon.

**There are few alternative education / school re-engagement options available for those aged under 16 in Darebin.**

- Current programs offered are generally only available for those aged 15 years and over.
- Teaching Units and other re-engagement programs offer only short term assistance.
- Alternative programs in the Darebin region (e.g. the Pavilion) have significant waiting lists and currently no strategy to engage young people while they wait for places to become available.

## Contributing Factors

Interviews with young people indicated that the following factors increased the likelihood of disengagement:

**Expulsion / asked to leave school:** Being expelled from school, then commencing at a new school for a month or two, before ceasing to attend altogether.

**Transition:** Transitioning from primary to secondary school. Attending the new school for a short period and then disengaging altogether.

**High mobility:** Families relocating due to housing rental changes resulting in young people changing schools, losing contact with peers or requiring longer travel.

**Disability:** High levels of disability and in particular young people with low IQ who are also just ineligible for additional support or special school education.

**Ineffective parenting and family dysfunction:** Parents lacking the ability to set limits and establish routines around school and work leading to young persons' inability to make it to school on a regular basis.

**Negative school experience of parents:** Parents who themselves have had unsuccessful or unsatisfactory school experiences finding it difficult to relate to and engage with schools, placing less importance on their child's attendance and engagement with school.

**Acting as a carer:** Young people remaining at home to act as a carer to family members, particularly where a parent has a mental illness and /or drug and alcohol dependence.

**On-line bullying:** Young people are increasingly disengaging from school for lengthy periods due to on-line bullying.

## Data Collection Issues

- The data used to inform research findings does not include data from Independent schools or Catholic schools in Darebin. The project was also unable to source data from various government departments including the Victorian Department of Human Services.
- There is extremely limited capacity to systematically track young people who are not enrolled in or attending school, or to quantify the numbers engaged in non-school based programs.
- The lack of alternative options available to those under 16 contributes to their invisibility, as they are ineligible for many alternative education programs or for income support.

- The focus of Government data collection on school disengagement commences at 15 years of age, when there is evidence that some young people of that age have not been going to school for several years.
- Research findings are considered to significantly understate the actual extent of disengagement in Darebin. In addition to the lack of incentive for young people under 16 to contact services for assistance, young people interviewed for this research all indicated that they personally knew of several other individuals under the age of 16 who were also not attending school. This suggests that the extent of disengagement may be larger than has been identified by schools and agencies.

## **Re-engagement – What Works**

Research suggests that there are four key requirements to assisting young people under the age of 16 to re-engage with education and training:

- Making real and enduring connections
- Meeting their welfare needs
- Providing learning opportunities relevant to needs; and
- Providing pathways that link learning to practical future opportunities

Young people interviewed in Darebin indicate that there are a number of enablers that helped them re-engage with education.

### **Supportive Relationships:**

Having a supportive relationship with staff involved in the re-engagement process is important. This reflects a need to feel connected to one or more people involved in the re-engagement process.

### **Applied Learning Options:**

Access to a curriculum that provides diverse applied ‘hands on’ learning opportunities such as a VCAL prior to Year 10.

### **Flexible Learning Environments:**

Opportunities to combine part-time school with other activities can assist some young people on the edge of disengagement. Some young people find it difficult to cope with full-time school, and start to absent themselves rather than having a structured opportunity to combine school with other activities which could also assist in developing skills.

### **Parental Involvement:**

The relationship between family members and schools can influence patterns of school attendance and engagement. The Family-School Partnership Framework provides supporting structures to assist and improve parent engagement in a young person’s learning.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations come under four distinct areas for action in order to improve education outcomes for young people in Darebin.

### **Data Collection - Creating an evidence base**

1. (a) Improve local data collection processes to enable more accurate identification of young people under the age of 16 who are not attending school.
  - Develop an agreed data collection approach with Principals from Government, Catholic and Independent schools and Community Agencies in Darebin.
  - Identify and collect data on attendance of all students in Darebin on an annual basis.
  - Advocate for participation in data collection by Victorian Government Department of Human Services
- (b) Develop a coordinated approach across the Northern Melbourne region to collect attendance data highlighting the numbers of young people under the age of 16 who are not attending school.

### **Reengagement in Education**

2. Schools and agencies work collaboratively with Youth Connections to develop a common strategy to identify and prioritise young people at risk of disengaging from education and integrate this strategy within existing school initiatives
3. Investigate developing a Darebin based engagement program that maintains a positive level of education engagement which includes wellbeing support to prepare the young people for re-entry into the education system.

### **Personalised and Applied Learning Frameworks**

4. Build the capacity of secondary schools in partnership with peak learning organisations to provide all students with personalised flexible and responsive learning options.
5. Develop alternative learning strategies and frameworks for applied learning options for students in middle years (Years 7 to 9) through partnerships with schools and vocationally focussed organisations.

### **Primary Secondary Transitions**

6. Develop a systematic primary and secondary transition process that supports effective student transition and provides support to those most at risk by establishing a good practice framework across schools.

7. Establish school community partnership models to develop and increase the capacity of schools to communicate and support families (parents and carers) and young people effectively transition from primary to secondary school. This should include practical actions and strategies to assist families to support their children to remain engaged in education at school.

# The Darebin Under 16 Project

## Introduction

The Darebin Under 16 Project was developed to identify how many young people under 16 years of age in the City of Darebin are disengaged from school, education and training, assess what form of support were available to these young people, and develop recommendations for a strategy to help re-engage them.

The project was commissioned by the consortia partners of the Inner Northern Youth Connections consortia and by the Inner Northern LLEN.

The new 2012 State Government Youth Statement “Engage, Involve, Create” provides relevant policy context for the project<sup>2</sup>. The Statement supports the use of partnerships to deliver the aims and priorities including “ensuring young people are engaged in education and training, further education and training pathways, and employment”.

This will increase opportunities for young Victorians to be engaged in:

*“Education and training that is accessible, flexible and relevant; that empowers them with choice and provides transferable skills like adaptability, responsiveness and lateral thinking.”<sup>3</sup>*

The Statement notes that difficulty in finding a job; low school attainment and health and wellbeing issues are often intergenerational. As a result, schools are encouraged to engage parents in their child’s learning and provide a platform for greater support to young people and their families. Government and communities will help vulnerable young people and their families to access education, training and community participation programs and funding.

The project originated in the concern of staff in the Youth Connections program operating across the northern region of Melbourne that there may be significant numbers of disengaged young people who were under the age of 16. These concerns were strengthened by reports from local agencies such as Brunswick Youth Services and the Pavilion that they had increasing waiting lists from young people under the age of 16 for entry to their support program.

The project was interested in young people aged between 10 and 15 years who were both completely disengaged, as well as those whose attendance record at school was poor.

An initial scoping report on educational disengagement among under 16 year olds commissioned by Youth Connections across the northern region of Melbourne in 2010 had found that there was

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<sup>2</sup> *Engage Involve Create – Youth Statement* Victorian Government, Melbourne, April 2012

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

evidence of quite large numbers of disengaged young people under 16 years of age when the whole of the northern region was considered.<sup>4</sup>

Of particular concern are the limited options available to young people under the age of 16 if they become disengaged from school. They are not eligible for support through Youth Allowance, they are unable to gain legal employment (unless granted an exemption at age 15), are too young to qualify for community based education programs such as community VCAL, as well as many support programs available to those aged 16 and over.

The lack of options contributes to the invisible nature of this group of disengaged young people. Since they are ineligible for many support programs as well as for income support, they can remain largely invisible to the education system and to other agencies unless they come into contact with human services workers and others dealing directly with their families.

This is reflected in how government collects data on disengagement. ABS statistics on *Educational Attainment: Early School Leavers* provides data only on those aged 15 and older. There is extremely limited capacity to track young people who are not enrolled in or attending school, or to quantify the numbers engaged in non-school based programs.<sup>5</sup>

## **Methodology**

The project was based on a series of data sources. It commenced with a desktop review of key documents including *The Report on educational disengagement of young people under 15 years of age in the Northern region (2010)* and various reports of the Inner Northern LLEN.

Interviews with staff from five local agencies and four government schools were used to map the service system, canvass issues and develop agreement on a format in which consistent and comparable data could be collected from schools, local agencies and key government departments. Separate interviews with six young people contacted through local agencies were arranged and used to identify key issues and develop the case studies included in this report.

## **Data availability**

A primary focus of this project was to try to discover as precisely as possible how many young people in the 10-15 year age group were not attending school.

To achieve this, the project was designed to obtain data from all schools within the City of Darebin on young people at risk of disengagement, and on those in the process of becoming disengaged. Data was collected only on those students attending Darebin schools who live in Darebin region postcodes. Government schools and the northern regional office of the Department of Education and

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<sup>4</sup> *Report on educational disengagement of young people under 15 years of age in the Northern region*, Combined Northern Region Youth Connections Consortia 2010

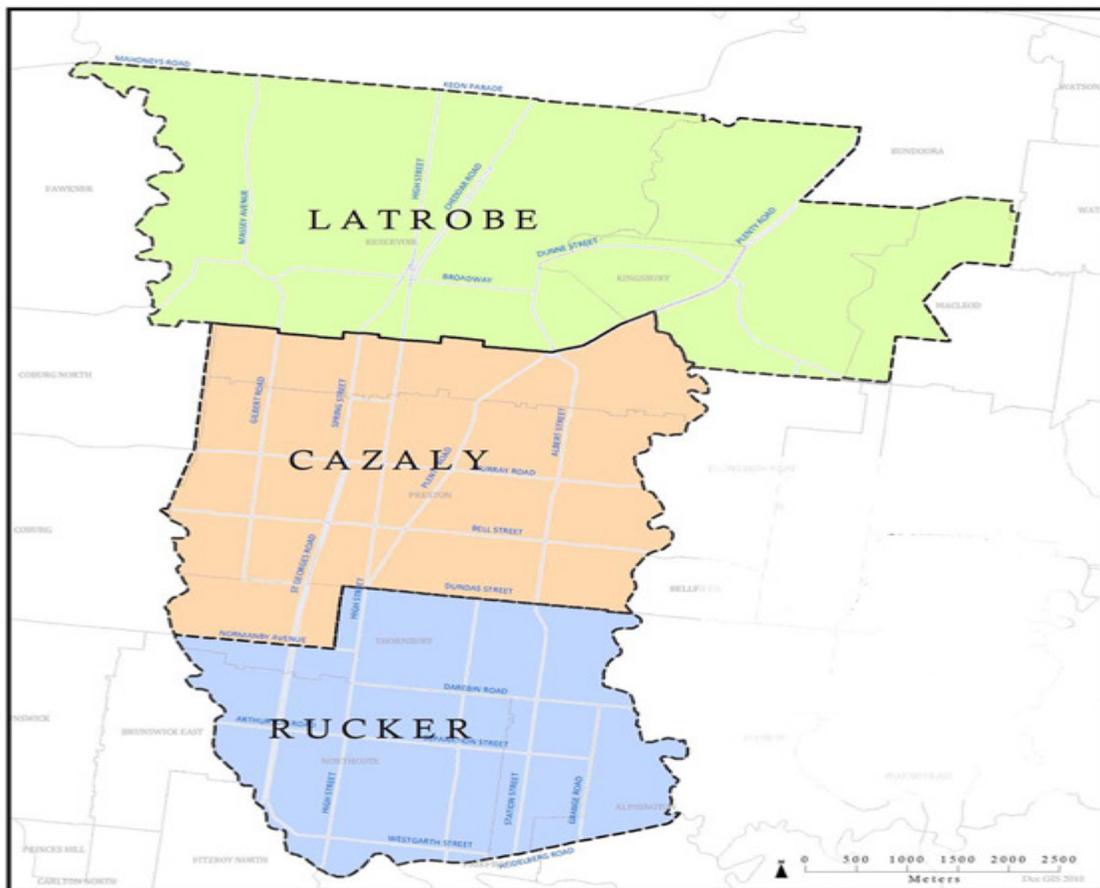
<sup>5</sup> KPMG, *Re-engaging Our Kids Framework for Education Provision to Children and Young People at Risk of Disengaging or Disengaged from School*, DEECD 2009

Early Childhood Development (DEECD) were all highly co-operative and provided the requested data in de-identified form.

To identify the number of young people in the under 16 age group who had completely disengaged from school, data was sought from all government and not for profit organisations that might come into contact with this group of young people.

Unfortunately, while most local agencies provided data in the format requested, the Victorian Department of Human Services which holds key data on vulnerable young people in this age group who may not be attending school, declined to provide data, citing the requirements of the Privacy Act. As a result, the number of young people in the age group able to be identified through their engagement with local services may be much lower than the actual numbers. Interviews with young people and agencies indicate frequent instances of multiple members of the 10-15 age group within one family who are all not attending school, or attending on an extremely irregular basis.

## Profile of the City of Darebin



Source: City of Darebin

The City of Darebin is a large municipality covering 53 sq km, and is one of the largest and most diverse communities in Victoria. The physical character of Darebin varies significantly from the inner city suburbs of Alphington, Fairfield, Northcote and Westgarth, through the established areas of Thornbury and Preston, out to the relatively new areas of Reservoir and the Bundoora North East Growth Corridor. Darebin City is bounded by the Merri Creek to the west and the Darebin Creek to the east.<sup>6</sup>

### **Culturally diverse**

It is a large, diverse municipality to the north of the central business district that incorporates a mix of residential, industrial and retail areas. More than 35% of Darebin's residents were born overseas, and more than 40% can speak a language other than English.<sup>7</sup>

### **SEIFA Index of Socio-economic Disadvantage**

The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines the Index of Socio-Economic Disadvantage as a general indicator that summarises the economic and social resources of people and households within an area. According to the SEIFA Index of Socio-economic disadvantage, Darebin has an overall moderate to low ranking (SEIFA 965.2) when compared to all Local Government Area populations across Australia.

Darebin ranks as the fifth most disadvantaged municipality out of the 31 municipalities in metropolitan Melbourne. While it reported a lower level of relative disadvantage in 2001 compared to 2006 (from 29th to 26th place in metropolitan Melbourne) it declined in 2006 to 27th place.<sup>8</sup>

### **Level of Educational achievement in Darebin**

The qualifications of residents of Darebin have changed significantly over the fifteen years from 1991 to 2006: almost three times as many residents reported having a university qualification in 2006 compared to 1991. At the same time, the proportion of residents with no further post-high school qualifications has dropped from 66.1% in 1991 to 47.2% in 2006. In 2006 there was a slightly larger proportion of residents in Darebin with university qualifications (21.4%), compared to residents across metropolitan Melbourne generally (19.6%).<sup>9</sup>

### **School completion rates**

The Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate in Victoria has increased over the past five years, from 77.2 per cent in 2005 to 79.8 per cent in 2009. However, within Darebin the increase has doubled that achieved across Victoria.

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<sup>6</sup> Darebin Environmental Scan July 2011, Inner Northern LLEN

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

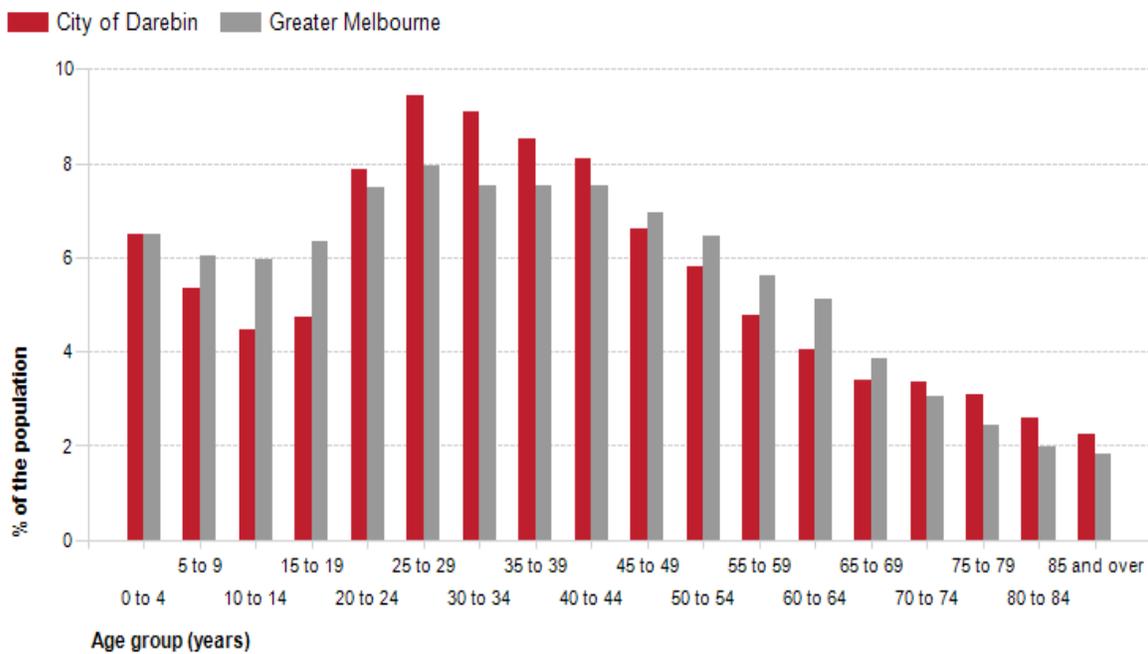
<sup>9</sup> [http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/Files/Darebin\\_Basic\\_Community\\_Profile\\_2006\\_Census.pdf](http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/Files/Darebin_Basic_Community_Profile_2006_Census.pdf)

In Darebin, over the five year period between 2005 to 2009, the Year 12 or equivalent rates have increased by 4.6 percentage points, from 77.7 percentage points in 2005 to 82.3 percentage points in 2009. In 2009, the Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates in Darebin was greater than that in the Northern Metropolitan region (80.7 per cent) and greater than the rate across Victoria (79.8 per cent).

### Youth population

Young people make up a smaller proportion of the population in Darebin than the average for the Melbourne Statistical District. The following table indicates that from the ages of 5 through to 19 year, the population in Darebin make up a smaller percentage of the overall population than they do on average across Melbourne.

#### Five year age structure, 2011



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2011 (Usual residence data)  
Compiled and presented by .id, the population experts.



Adolescent children in Darebin comprise 6.9% of the population; lower than the percentage of adolescents in the Northern Metropolitan region (9.3%) and also lower than the percentage of adolescents in Victoria (10.1%).<sup>10</sup>

Darebin was ranked 74 out of 79 LGAs in terms of the percentage of adolescents in the population. And the smaller percentage of the overall population is projected to continue into the future. Of the anticipated total population of 143,823 in the year 2016, 15% will be below the age of 18.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Darebin Adolescent Community Profile 2010 DEECD

<sup>11</sup> Darebin Environmental Scan 2011 INLLEN

## Diverse

Darebin's population is one of the most diverse communities anywhere in Australia.

Over 35% of Darebin's residents were born in countries other than Australia. The major contributing countries are Italy, Greece, the United Kingdom, China and Vietnam, but significant growth is being experienced in the community of people born in Sri Lanka, India, Egypt, the Philippines and countries from across the Middle East.<sup>12</sup>

More than 40% of Darebin residents can speak a language other than English, with the proportion of residents speaking Italian, Greek, Arabic, Vietnamese and Chinese being roughly three times the respective rates across Melbourne.

Emerging languages include Tamil, Sinhalese (Sri Lanka and Southern India) and Tagalog (Philippines).<sup>13</sup>

## Indigenous population

The Inner North, and particularly Darebin, has one of the highest concentrations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Victoria.

Darebin's indigenous population has declined slightly in recent years, but with over 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders still make up one of the largest indigenous communities anywhere in metropolitan Victoria.

**Table 1: Aboriginal population of Darebin, Moreland, Yarra, the Northern Metropolitan region and Victoria (2006)**

	Aboriginal Population			Total Population		
	Adolescent Children	Total Population	Percentage Population	Adolescent Children	Total Population	Percentage Population
Darebin	173	1,111	15.6%	9,591	128,065	7.5%
Moreland	92	626	14.7%	10,729	135,765	7.9%
Yarra	25	250	10.0%	3,261	69,330	4.7%
Northern Metro	810	4,401	18.4%	78,251	780,252	10.0%
Victoria	5,826	30,144	19.3%	531,601	4,932,422	10.8%

Source: Darebin Environmental Scan July 2011, Inner Northern LLEN

According to the 2006 Census, there were 1,111 Aboriginal persons in Darebin. This represents 0.9 per cent of the total population of Darebin. This was greater than the percentage of Aboriginal

<sup>12</sup> ibid

<sup>13</sup> Darebin Environmental Scan 2011 INLLEN

persons in Victoria (0.6 per cent). Darebin has both the largest number, and the highest proportion, of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents of all of the municipalities in metropolitan Melbourne.

In Victoria, 531,601 adolescents were counted at the 2006 Census, representing 10.8 per cent of Victoria's total population. Of these, 5,826 (1.1 per cent) were Aboriginal adolescents. In 2006, 15.6 per cent of the Aboriginal population in Darebin were adolescents, compared to 7.5 per cent in the total population.

## Attendance at school

A key indicator of growing disengagement from school is a long term pattern of poor attendance at school. High levels of poor attendance over an extended period indicate elevated levels of risk of subsequent disengagement from school.

In order to assess the extent of potential school disengagement, data on patterns of school non-attendance in 2011 were collected from secondary schools across Darebin. The data collected shows that there are significant numbers of young people between the ages of 10 and 15 in the City of Darebin attending school on average less than 80% of the time, and a smaller but still sizeable group attending less than 60% of the time. The following table indicates the total enrolment in government schools in Darebin by the four year levels that cover the age range of 12 to 15 year olds. These are as follows:

**Table 2: Enrolment in government schools in Darebin 2011**

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
Government schools	644	690	649	609

Source: DEECD Northern Regional Office unpublished data

There are 2592 students enrolled in government schools in Years 7 to 10. Assuming that half of the Year 10 cohort will turn 16 at mid year, it is estimated that around 2288 will have been aged between 12 and 15 in 2011.

Data provided by government secondary schools indicates there are at least 26 young people in this age group attending school on average less than 3 days a week, and a further 94 attending less than 4 days a week. A total of over 120 young people across Darebin attending government schools are missing at least one day of school on average each week.

Based on the data reported by the government schools, 4.1% of this age group are missing an average of one day of school each week, and a further 1.1% is missing more than 2 days of school each week on average.

**Table 3: Average 2011 attendance less than 4 days a week (over 20% non-attendance)**

	20-40% Male	20-40% Female	Total
School A	0	13	13
School B	10	8	18
School C	0*	0*	0 *
School D <sup>14</sup>	0	0	0
School E	23	39	62
School F	1	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>94</b>

\* this secondary school reported problems accessing historical attendance data. Indicative attendance data for 2012 from this school, though not directly comparable with the 2011 data from other schools, shows 35 students from School D attending less than 4 days a week.

The 12 to 14 age group comprise approximately half of those averaging less than three days of school. Females outnumber males by two to one.

**Table 4: Average 2011 school attendance less than 3 days a week (over 40% non-attendance)**

	40+% Male	40+% Female	Total
School A	0	4	4
School B	2	3	5
School C	0*	0*	0*
School D	3	2	5
School E	7	3	10
School F	0	2	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>26</b>

\* this school reported problems accessing historical attendance data. Indicative attendance data for 2012 from this school, though not directly comparable with the 2011 data from other schools, shows 17 students from School D attending less than 3 days a week.

The 12-14 year old age group again comprise roughly half of those averaging attendance between 3 and 4 days each week. Again, more females than males are missing school.

## Expulsions

There were eight expulsions reported by government schools in 2011. Of these, seven of those expelled were male and one was female. Four of those expelled were aged 14, and one was aged 13.

## Uncontactable

A further six students were reported as still enrolled at government schools in 2011, but were also reported as being “unable to be contacted” for a various reasons. They include four 13 year olds and two 14 year olds.

<sup>14</sup> School D indicates that their data for 2011 is an accurate reflection of levels of school attendance in Years 7,8 and 9, and results from implementation of dedicated school attendance officers who quickly follow up non-attendance with family phone contact to encourage parental intervention. School re-structuring and amalgamation have also contributed to the formation of a cohort of students more likely to regular school attendance.

Patterns of irregular school attendance commence early in primary school years. Principals of local primary school report patterns of late arrival or non-attendance commencing from Grade 1 and continuing through the early years of school, establishing a pattern of intermittent attendance with associated learning issues. This occurs across both the primary and the secondary school years.

### **Students in Alternate Learning Settings**

There are a small but significant proportion of young people under the age of 16 who continue their education either on a full-time or part-time basis in settings other than regular secondary schools. This is either as a result of expulsion from these schools or their own decision to no longer attend secondary school.

Within Darebin, the alternate options for under 16 year olds are primarily offered VCAL programs offered through the NMIT Youth Unit, Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education (PRACE), the Pavillion School (which also provides curriculum based on the VELs for students too young to undertake VCAL) and the Island.

**Table 5: Darebin Under 16 Enrolments in Alternate Settings**

	Age 12	Age 13	Age 14	Age 15	Total
PRACE	0	0	0	48	<b>48</b>
NMIT	0	0	0	29	<b>29</b>
The Island	0	0	0	4	<b>4</b>
The Pavillion	3	10	9	10	<b>32</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>113</b>

### **Disengagement from school**

There are a smaller number of young people in this age group who cease attending school altogether for periods ranging from one to three years. Interviews with a sample of young people indicated that the following transitions sometimes led to young people ceasing to attend school.

- Some who had been expelled or asked to leave school, may or may not have commenced at a new school for a month or two, and then ceased to attend altogether
- Some who had transitioned from primary to secondary school, attended the secondary school for a short period and then stopped attending altogether
- Some who had families that experienced relatively high mobility through short term rental changes, and in the process ceased attending school.
- Some who after repeated suspensions simply decide not to return to school.

This suggests that the transition involved when a young person moves between schools (either through expulsion, a request to voluntarily leave, or in the move from primary to secondary school) is a time when they have a much stronger likelihood of becoming disengaged.

## **Primary to Secondary Transition**

The primary to secondary school transition represents a weak link in the transition process for vulnerable and partially disengaged young people. In some instances, students commence secondary school but have started to completely disengage within a matter of weeks or months before they form any solid relationship with staff or other students. The existing mechanisms that link these students and families in the crossover from primary to secondary are insufficient to maintain their involvement.

As an indication, one Darebin non-school agency reports receiving enquiries from between 15-30 parents each year seeking alternative options for their children who are refusing to make the transition from their primary school to Year 7 in a local secondary school.

Staff at the Adult Community Education Centre located in Reservoir that provides VCAL and preparatory programs for 15 and 16 year olds report *“enrolling some young people of this age in the region who have never been to secondary school at all.”* Welfare staff in some of the local secondary schools also confirm that at Year 7 there are some students who enrol who only attend once or twice, if at all, and never come back. *“Once they are here they are followed up, but if they never make it at all, then this doesn’t really occur.”* Several of the case studies included later in this report also highlight that there are a group of young people who are lost to the school system at the beginning of secondary school with little or no apparent follow-up.

## **High mobility**

Personal and family mobility is a particular factor leading to disengagement for some individuals and groups. Both peak bodies and service agencies indicate that this is a contributing factor to lengthy periods of non engagement with education, and this was confirmed through several of the interviews. This is particularly an issue for some local schools such as Thornbury SC, which currently has 53 indigenous students enrolled in the school.

The large indigenous adolescent population in Darebin is particularly vulnerable to prolonged disengagement from education and training. A Koorie Early School Leavers program in the region reported that of 60 clients they supported in 2010/11 *...‘on entry to the program most have dropped out of school by Year 8 or below...and many have been out of school several years by the time they get to this program’*. Over 30% are not enrolled in an education setting when they arrive and in one family alone there were four young people under 16 years of age out of school for at least two years.<sup>15</sup>

## **Length of disengagement**

A standard period of complete disengagement for those who cease attending schools appears to be between 18 months and two years. Evidence for this is found not only in the interviews conducted with families and young people, but also in the experience of programs such as the Pavilion whose clients have typically been out of school for such periods prior to enrolling with their programs.

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<sup>15</sup> Moreland Under 16 Report, 2011 Inner Northern LLEN

The Victorian Department of Human Services is a key agency with whom disengaged young people are likely to come into contact. However, DHS Victoria did not make data available to this project. Therefore only general estimates can be made of the extent of those completely disengaged from education, training and employment in Darebin. Some of the young people aged between 10 and 15 who were interviewed for this project were completely disengaged from school for periods of up to two years.

Some of the young people interviewed for case studies in this project indicated that they personally knew several other people of the same age who were also not attending school at all any more.

### Contact with support services

There were two Youth Connections services that reported young people from Darebin being assisted in this age group in 2011.

Mission Australia	Preston
NMIT Youth Unit	Heidelberg

**Table 5: Agencies reporting Darebin clients under the age of 16 assisted in 2011.**

Females	Males	Total
9	8	17

### Age of those disengaged

The extent of school non-engagement increases as young people reach 15 years of age. There was one 12 year old, one 13 years old, and one 14 year old being assisted by these agencies. Predictably, the largest group were 15 year olds. Once students have ceased attending, they report being out of school for several years.

**Table 6: Client age of actual numbers of under 16 year olds supported by Agencies**

Age of client	Number
11 years or younger	0
12 years old	1
13 years old	1
14 years old	1
15 years old	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>

Not all of these 17 young people are entirely disengaged from school – but the majority are. The agencies were asked to indicate how many of the under 16 year olds from Darebin they were assisting were known to be not attending school at all. They collectively indicated that 9 of the 17 young people aged 10-15 year olds that they were assisting were ‘out of school.’

**Table 7: 2011 Agency Clients under the age of 16 reported to be not attending schools**

Females	Males	Total
4	5	9

**When the 9 not attending school in 2011 are added to the 120 who were attending school less than four days a week on average across the year, there are over 129 young people identified as either partially or completely disengaged from school in Darebin.**

### **Australian Government Department of Human Services**

Since all Centrelink primary payments require applicant to be 16 years of age, few young people are reported as contacting Centrelink for assistance except in exceptional circumstances. As soon as young people turned 16 however, there are significant numbers applying for assistance through Youth Allowance, Disability Support Payment, and Low Income Cards.

The Centrelink office in Darebin was unable to provide specific 2011 data for the project.

### **NMIT TAFE Youth Services**

NMIT provided data on the number of young people from Darebin under 16 years of age enrolled across the Institute in 2011. This data includes young people studying pre-apprenticeships, VCAL and possibly VCE programs, but does not include VET in Schools (as those young people would still be enrolled at a school) or short courses. The 29 students reported by NMIT for 2011 were almost entirely aged 15 when they enrolled.

**Table 9: 2011 NMIT enrolments under the age of 16.**

	Females	Males	Total
NMIT	5	24	29

\* excludes VET in Schools and Short Course enrolments

Almost all of these young people were aged 15 when they enrolled at TAFE in 2011. The majority of these students either lived in the Preston and Reservoir area, or the Kingsbury and Macleod end of the LGA.

### **Department of Human Services (Victoria)**

No data returns were provided from the Department of Human Services (Victoria) which includes young people in Residential Care. The lack of information available from this Department makes it difficult to determine how many more young people under 16 might be disengaged from school, as it is services such as Juvenile Justice, Child Protection and Residential Care that have a higher likelihood of being in contact with young people in this situation.

Research highlights that many children and young people who have been in out-of-home care leave formal schooling at a relatively young age, with 47 per cent of young people surveyed leaving school before the age of 16.<sup>16</sup>

**The DHS Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment** (a 2010 Partnering Agreement between the Department of Human Services, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and Independent Schools Victoria) outlines the requirements and responsibilities of all parties to work in cooperation to improve the educational experience and outcomes of children and young people in out of-home care.

Amongst other things, this provides a framework to monitor educational engagement and achievement more closely in order to improve outcomes related to student enrolment, attendance, achievement, case planning, retention and school completion. As the Partnering Agreement notes:

*“Regular attendance at school is essential if children and young people are to engage with education and actively participate in learning. It is important that children develop habits of regular attendance at an early age. Students who are regularly absent from school are at risk of missing out on fundamental aspects of their educational and social development, and disengaging from schooling”*(p.13)

**Key data that to establish how many young people under 16 in out of home care in Darebin are disengaged from school would assist in providing a more complete picture of the extent and nature of educational disengagement.**

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<sup>16</sup> Children in Out-of-Home Care in Victoria: Numbers in Care and Educational Outcomes Achieved, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, May 2008

## Case Studies

Young people were interviewed at Darebin Youth Drop in Centre at Northland Shopping Centre, and at the Pavilion School in Preston.

### Case Study 1.

Brad is 14 years old. He is enrolled at a government Secondary College in Darebin.

He lives with his mother. He has an older brother and sister who are both in their mid 20s, neither of whom now live at home. His older brother did not like school and was always running away from school when he was in Year 9 and 10.

Brad wakes up late once or twice a week and on those days, he usually just continues to sleep. His mother tends to sometimes sleep in as well, though sometimes she does try to wake him for school (but usually unsuccessfully).

He says that he depends on his mother to wake him and “thinks he might need a louder alarm”. Apparently he doesn’t really stay up late and is usually in bed by 10 or 11pm.

When he does stay home from school he sometimes goes out with his mother and accompanies her in whatever she is doing.

Brad feels that he has few friends at school. In primary school he felt that he used to ‘get picked on’ in Grade 6, and now doesn’t care so much what people say to him.

He says he still wants to complete school and is interested in post school study

### Case Study 2.

Kaylene is 15 years old.

She has attended six different high schools in the northern suburbs of Melbourne and was also home schooled for half a year.

Kaylene has a younger sister aged 13 who is following a similar path and is also not going to school all the time, but in Kaylene’s eyes the sister is not as unstable in her attendance as she has been.

Kaylene stopped going to school primarily as a result of bullying which she says commenced while she was still at primary school and continued on at high school. She subsequently found it hard to get motivated about going to school or in completing work when she was there.

She also found the conformity required by school difficult to cope with, particularly the uniform dress code.

She did not attend the schools on a regular basis, never handed in homework, and tended to just stay at home “doing nothing productive.” Her days consisted of eating, drinking and watching TV on her own at home.

She has made only one or two friends from the time that she spent at school. *“It was just the wrong kind of schooling for me...”*

Kaylene investigated the Sydney Road Community School as a potential alternative to mainstream schools, but just as she was considering enrolling there, she chanced across another option that suited her better.

Referred to the Austin Hospital CAMHS program in Heidelberg (which she found very helpful) she found a return to school program, and is now enrolled in a VCAL at the Council for Adult Education (CAE). She thinks that this is a much better setting for her with better teachers and better students. At 15 she is the youngest person in the VCAL class.

She says she is now much happier and attends her VCAL program every day.

### Case Study 3.

**Jasper** is 14 years old and still attending school most of the time. He lives with his mother and an older sister at home.

He was expelled from his previous secondary school halfway through second term, and started at another secondary school in Darebin. While he still goes to school most weeks a week, every now and then he decides not to go for a couple of days.

He often feels tired in the morning as a result of staying up late at night playing computer games. When he feels too tired, he just stays home and spends half the day asleep in bed.

His mother is concerned about his education and the fact that he stays up all night playing computer games. As he says... *“I am addicted.”* He prefers to play on-line games than interact with other people, although he has started to attend the Darebin Drop In Centre that he found out about through a friend from his previous school via Facebook.

He says that he knows of at least one other student who also stays at home and sleeps in when they are too tired to go to school, but he doesn't really have any friends at the school (having recently commenced there) and only knew a few of them vaguely from Primary school days. *“I don't mix much with them...”*

Jasper can't be bothered doing the work at school which he finds too boring, although he has an interest in computers and would like to do an IT course next year as an elective. He thinks that school would be better if the activities there were more interesting, and in particular if there were more hands on activities available.

#### Case Studies 4.

Adrian is 15 years old.

He lives at home with both his parents, a brother and three sisters. Two of his older siblings have both attended the Pavilion school for disengaged students, and Adrian now also attends the Pavilion.

In primary school he attended regularly, and went okay until he reached 6<sup>th</sup> Grade when he began to find that he couldn't handle the work. From that point on he began to go to school less regularly.

He attended two different secondary colleges in Darebin in Year 7 and Year 8. In Year 7 at the first school he began to get suspended regularly for disrupting classes and throwing things at teachers. He says now that he was frustrated and angry. School was 'hard and he didn't get the purpose of it.' He had a poor relationship with the senior staff, and his regular suspensions meant that he was only going to school intermittently.

After changing secondary schools, Adrian was suspended in Year 8 early in 2011, and never went back again. (As far as he knows there was no follow up by the school about his subsequent lack of attendance). Then he spent a year not going to school at all.

During that year he spent most of his time sitting at home on Play station, hanging out with his friends and going to skate parks.

He knew one other person of the same age who was not going to school at all, and another seven or eight who were not going to school regularly. While his parents were not happy that he wasn't going to school, they were unable to make him attend.

It was his older sister who encouraged him to go to the Pavilion school and enrol there in 2012. He says that he receives more individual help at this school and that there is more flexibility to learn the way that he wants to (for example, he is allowed to study in class listening to music on his headphones... *"there is more give and take"*.)

He attends the Pavilion for two hours a day each day of the week.

### Case Study 5.

Tony is now 15 years old. He lives with his mother and two sisters. He has a sister aged 16 (who has left school but is not working) and a younger sister (14 year old) who is attending a local secondary college.

He attended a Primary School which closed down the year that he finished Grade 6. He had been in trouble quite a lot while at Primary school, fighting with other students and not listening to teachers. *“I stuffed around and got suspended quite a lot.”* The next year he went to a local High School.

He attended secondary school for the first three days of the year, but decided that he didn't like it because the work was too hard and he “didn't know anyone”. After three days he refused to go back to school, and spent the rest of Year 7 at home.

His normal day consisted of playing games on Play station, on the computer and watching television. Then he might 'go out to see his mates at a skate park in West Heidelberg'. These friends were 13 and 14 year olds who were enrolled part-time at the Pavilion School, and through them he was introduced to the option of the Pavilion.

He enrolled in the Pavilion school when he was 13 after a year out of school, and thinks that the smaller number of student in the classes makes it easier to get help, and the shorter day (2 or 3 hours) makes it easier to cope with. He particularly enjoys graffiti art classes organised through the school. Luke can't read very well and is at a low primary level curriculum.

He says that his move from primary to secondary school might have gone more smoothly if he had been allowed to select a class to go into that his friends were in.

### Case Study 6.

Rob is from an indigenous family.

The family arrangements from an early age saw Rob and a younger brother living with his mother, while three older siblings lived with a grandmother. The older siblings have generally completed Year 12. His mother and father are now both deceased, and Rob lives some of the time with his older sister (aged 21), and some of his time with 'a mate.'

He went to school regularly when he was at the local primary school. He says that the principal at his primary school didn't like him, but he had a lot of support there from indigenous support workers.

However, as soon as he started secondary school, he encountered problems with the level of discipline and the direction he was given by teachers to do work.

He attended a local secondary college in year 7, but only went to school for a few days. At the age of 12 he stopped attending school and for six months or so began hanging around with a group of other young people 'who were always wagging school'. There were between 10 – 15 young people in this group, all a little older than he, who would regularly wag school and go off into the city together.

A typical day consisted of waking up, going around to friends places or the local shopping centre and just 'kicking up' a bit. This also included use of marijuana.

His mother didn't like what he was doing, and she made contact with the Pavilion school exploring the option to enrol him there. (His mother subsequently passed away a year ago). His younger brother aged 14 also attends the Pavilion.

He has now been attending the Pavilion school for several years since the age of 13 (he is now 16). He attends school both to 'see his mates' as well as to complete his VCAL. He thinks that he would like to become a mechanic or a carpenter. He is exploring options to complete his VCAL at the Pavilion while simultaneously doing a part-time TAFE course.

## **Factors contributing to disengagement**

There is a combination of factors that contribute to school disengagement among younger students: some are to do with the personal circumstances and skills of the individual, more often to do with their family context, and also the nature of the school system in which they find themselves.

In 2008 a literature review investigated the disengagement of young people from secondary education in the northern region and identified the support and pathways necessary for young people to succeed in school (Drummond 2008).

Drummond noted that there are many reasons that young people become disengaged and that the key school years between Year 5 and Year 9 is when students need to experience success in their studies, be challenged and engaged in things that are of interest to them. The literature review identified a number of factors that contributed to disengagement and include:

- Negative feelings about the value of their continued involvement in schooling
- Lack of parental support
- An under-valuing by parents, teachers and community of vocations that are not academic
- Lack of awareness of all education and work options and pathways
- Lack of engagement with the community
- Poor literacy and numeracy skills at the time of transition to secondary school
- Experience of failure with study, which causes a lack of future motivation.

Interviews with local youth service and support providers and with school staff identified a series of factors particularly prevalent in their experience in Darebin.

### **Students with Additional Learning Needs**

One important contributing factor to school disengagement is the high level of learning disability among students that mainstream schools are unable to effectively deal with. Testing of young people provides results that frequently score just over the cut off point on eligibility for special school education. (For example young people demonstrating autism related disorders such as Aspergers which result in challenging behaviour but where IQ levels may be above the level required to access services at special schools).

### **Mental health issues**

Higher rates of poor mental health are reported among young people in the Darebin region. The 2010 Darebin Adolescent Community Profile indicated that young people in Darebin have a significantly higher rate of psychiatric hospitalisation, and hospitalisation for self harm than those in other parts of the Northern Region, or the average rate across Victoria. Young people in Darebin also reported higher levels of psychological distress than their equivalents in other parts of the Northern Region or the average for Victoria.<sup>17</sup> Staff working at the Pavillion school also identify high rates of mental health issues for young people in Darebin. This has implications for the capacity of young people to positively engage in schooling.

### **Family poverty and dysfunction**

Family poverty and dysfunction are reported as key contributors to educational disengagement both by school staff and by Family Services teams. Parents in some cases lack control over their children. In other instances the absence of a regular household routine based around school and work makes it extremely difficult for young people to make it to school on any regular basis.

An additional factor is the number of parents who have themselves previously had unsuccessful and unsatisfactory experiences with their own schooling, who as a result find it difficult to relate to and engage with schools, and place less importance on their children's regular school attendance and engagement. Families who are themselves not well connected don't tend to see education as an important option.

### **Acting as family carers**

Some young people are encouraged to remain at home to act as carers for family members, sometimes when parents have issues with drug or alcohol addiction, but in other cases due to the psychological dependency of the parent on the child.

### **Young people who are in Care**

An "at risk" group are young people who are in Care. While this group are particularly at risk of disengaging before the age of 16, the impact of partnering arrangements between schools and DHS case managers on patterns of school attendance continues to be difficult to obtain.

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<sup>17</sup> Darebin Adolescent Community Profile 2010 DEECD

## **On-line bullying**

A developing trend causing increased rates of non-attendance is the occurrence of on-line bullying between students. Both school staff and workers in some agencies noted this as an increasing cause and was leading otherwise academically capable students to refuse to attend school for periods of varying duration.

## **What would help young people re-engage?**

Recent national and international research on models of effective re-engagement for disengaged learners has identified four key requirements that are also applicable to assisting young people under the age of 16.<sup>18</sup>

- **Find some way of connecting** with disengaged young people who may be socially marginalised in order to identify their needs and inform them of available options. This variously involves providing easily accessible information, bringing learning to the learner, targeting high needs groups, and establishing lasting meaningful relationships.
- **Addressing their welfare needs** is crucial for any successful intervention. Successful interventions recognise that they are often dealing with young people who have a variety of obstacles that affect their capacity to participate in learning. Intensive support through guidance, counselling, monitoring and follow-up, taking a client sensitive approach to well-being, developing beneficial relationships within the community, delivering services within a hub, and providing whole community or familial intervention are five essential strategies in addressing learner needs associated with well-being.
- **An appropriate approach to learning** that takes account of young people's previous negative experiences of learning, failure at school, and avoidance of formal teaching and learning. Disengaged learners require acknowledgment of their learning interests and building upon their pre-existing knowledge and skills. Four core strategies identified for effective programs are: making learning applied or hands on, providing flexible learning options, addressing literacy and numeracy skill development needs and offering programs that integrate technologies.
- **Creating and presenting relevant pathways** for learners that provide links to other study and to work and career development opportunities.

## **What young people are saying?**

Within this project, young disengaged people were asked what would have helped them remain at school or made returning more viable. Their responses echoed some of the themes identified in the research:

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<sup>18</sup> Davies M, Lamb S, and Doecke E, Strategic Review of Effective Re-engagement models for Disengaged Learners, University of Melbourne 2011 p6

### **Supportive relationships with staff**

The benefit of having a supportive relationship with staff involved in the re-engagement process is important to young people. This reflects a need to feel connected to one or more people involved in the re-engagement process and is more viable in small scale programs. It is usually in contrast to their previous educational experience where relationships were not seen to have been sufficiently supportive.

### **More practical applied options earlier in the school curriculum**

A strong theme in the opinions of those we interviewed was an interest in applied learning that was not available to them in Years 7 to 9. The curriculum available to them seemed boring and appeared to them to emphasise what they could not do rather than what they could. This was particularly the case if they found the required levels of reading and numeracy challenging. A curriculum that provided diverse applied 'hands on' learning opportunities was attractive to many of those interviewed, and was a factor in the strong interest in enrolling in various VCAL options once they were old enough to do so.

### **Opportunities to combine part-time school with other activity**

The flexibility of blending part-time school with other community engagement and support activities would assist some young people teetering on the edge of disengagement. Some find it difficult to cope with full-time school, and start to absent themselves rather than having a structured opportunity to combine with other activity that might also be usefully developing skills. Part-time schooling is already an option utilized by the Pavillion School (teaching on a 2-3 hour a day basis) and the take-up of part-time options combined with other appropriate programs could and should be encouraged.

### **Building on the value of peer relationships**

Some school staff report that a percentage of their younger students who leave school subsequently return after one or two terms as they miss their friends. Several of the disengaged young people interviewed for case studies reported that the main thing they missed about school if they left were their school friends. Greater use might be made of these relationships in pro-actively encouraging students to return to school.

## **Services to support young people in Darebin**

### **Alternative Education Programs**

Young people who are marginally engaged at school, or who have become disengaged need access to alternative options for learning to the mainstream secondary schools. The large mainstream secondary schools are limited in their capacity to respond to the particular needs of these students. Teaching and learning environments that are most likely to be able to help these students re-engage are relatively small in scale (compared to normal secondary schools), have the capacity to develop learning programs that meet the needs of the individual, and provide significant social and emotional support in conjunction with the curriculum.

Research and practice has identified the following approaches to teaching to be essential elements for re-engagement.

- Making learning less formal
- Providing flexible options
- Addressing literacy and numeracy skill development needs
- Making learning applied or hands-on

### **Meet welfare needs**

Identifying and acting upon the welfare needs of disengaged young people are also required for any successful intervention. Best practice delivery interventions recognise that they are dealing with people who have a variety of obstacles that affect their ability to learn. The factors that impact on their wellbeing are complex including mental-health, drug and alcohol issues, family violence, and no history of people working in the family.

### **Provide holistic approach**

Many programs adopt a holistic approach that simultaneously develops supports for addressing personal wellbeing needs while helping the young person access the learning program appropriate to their needs.<sup>19</sup> A holistic approach developing a range of partnerships within a program can assist in meeting the needs of disengaged learners.

### **Provide sustained approach**

The other element required is a sustained approach. If young people have been disengaged from education for several years, then short term 10 or 12 week programs are unlikely to be sufficient to provide a longer term re-engagement option.

There are limited alternative education options available to young people under 16 in Darebin that combine these elements. The options that have been identified are as follows:

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<sup>19</sup> Davies M, Lamb S, and Doecke E, Strategic Review of Effective Re-engagement models for Disengaged Learners, University of Melbourne 2011

- **Teaching Units**

Teaching Units at Coburg, Heidelberg and Brunswick West provide short term interventions in an attempt to re-engage the students over a term before transitioning them back into regular secondary schools. The Teaching Units offer temporary intensive assistance (12 weeks) for students experiencing learning, social or emotional difficulties at school. Teaching Units aim to re-integrate students back into their schools after their period of placement in the intensive Teaching Unit. The Units typically provide intensive language, literacy, numeracy and social programs. Students are accepted from all secondary schools. Students attend four days a week, and on the other day attend their original school to maintain contact and establish a re-integration plan.

- **The Pavilion**

The Pavilion School campus in Preston provides for young people aged 14 to 20 years old. The Pavilion started with 20 students in 2009, and has since expanded to 150 students across the two campuses (the second in Mill Park). Its aim is to re-engage students who have been outside of any education and training for a minimum of 3 months by creating a positive relationship with the student as a basis for change.

The school is designed as a transition and/or re-integration centre for young people who access educational support tailored to individual needs in small classes of 6 to 12 people. Social work support is provided to each student and can include counselling, advice and referral if required. Learning is based on the Victorian Essential Learning Standards and the VCAL.

The Pavilion offers the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) program within a targeted curriculum that tackles individual learning deficiencies over a shortened-time period, while meeting the requirements of the certification. The school staff have extensive experience in both social work and education. Each student's initial contact point is with the school counsellor, who instigates one-on-one therapeutic sessions to talk to students and their families, to identify the support structures they need to have put in place to recommence their studies and start at the school.

Most referrals are from schools and Youth Connections agencies in Darebin.

**The VCAL certificate** becomes an applied learning option for some young people once they turn 15, although most programs do not accept them until they have almost turned 16. There are two non-school based VCAL options within Darebin, plus the Island which is located close by in the City of Moreland.

- **PRACE**

The Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education Centre (PRACE) is based in Reservoir and offers a Foundation Level community VCAL. The VCAL program is designed to suit young people who have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from mainstream education, but only accepts enrolments from students aged 15 years and 11 months. The main focus is on 16-19 year olds. This year PRACE have 18 young people enrolled in Foundation and Intermediate VCAL, another 18 undertaking a “Pre-VCAL” program, and 12 young mothers in their own VCAL group.

- **NMIT (Centre for Youth)**

The Centre for Youth at NMIT Institute in Heidelberg provides both VCAL and VCE programs for early school leavers, as well as pre-apprenticeships and other VET Certificate courses. The Unit offers VCAL at Foundation, Intermediate and Senior level, as well as a Young Adult Migrant Education Course for those aged 15 and older.

- **The Island**

The Island is located in Coburg and is a small ‘hands on’ educational provider that offers work preparation education and training programs for 15-18 year olds through VCAL options at Foundation and Intermediate level. The majority of their enrolments either come from western region LGAs or are aged over 16. According to welfare and support staff in some Darebin schools, the Island is too far away from Darebin for it to be a viable option for local students. There are opportunities to better utilise the Island, but in its current configuration as a vocational program, care would need to be taken to ensure that the greater use is accompanied by appropriate intake and student support programs.

### **Analysis of Education Programs to support re-engagement**

It is apparent from this listing of education re-engagement programs in Darebin that there are very few options for those aged under 16. At 15 there are at least some options (e.g. The Island, the Pavilion), but for anyone under 15 there are almost none.

Teaching Units offer only short assistance for a term; and then students have to return to their mainstream school and the same environment which they previously found problematic.

### **Location of options**

The location of educational services is also an issue.

As a result, the pattern that appears to develop for young people who become disengaged from school in Years 7, 8 and 9 is a “waiting game”. If they decide that they do not want to attend one of the mainstream secondary schools, they wait out the period of one, two or three years until they are eligible for less-formal, flexible and applied learning programs (such as VCAL) at the age of 15 or 16.

In the meantime, they are largely invisible to both education and other support systems.

### **Other Services supporting re-engagement for those under 16**

There are a variety of youth services that address particular barriers to educational and community engagement such as mental health services, disability services, and services for the homeless that can be accessed in the region. However, in this section we have confined the analysis to those services that have some focus on engagement and re-engagement with education and training.

### **Youth Connections**

The main initiative established to support young people in the younger age group is the Commonwealth funded Youth Connections program that provides support for 13-19 year olds who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging.

Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE is the lead agent for the Inner Northern Youth Connections consortia, and many of the main agencies in the LGA that provide youth services are also members of the consortia. Youth Connections service delivery in Darebin is provided by Mission Australia and the NMIT Youth Unit.

### **Darebin Mental Health Services**

The Austin Health Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) provides a wide range of free services, delivering mental health care for children, adolescents and their families or carers. It comprises a state-wide child inpatient unit for children 12 years and under, a regional adolescent inpatient unit, 3 regional community outpatient teams, an adolescent intensive management team, mental health promotion officers, a dedicated intake team and administrative and support staff.

In addition CAMHS provides a consultation liaison service to children and adolescents admitted to the acute hospital and a dedicated assessment program for Autism Spectrum disorders. CAMHS works in close collaboration with the Austin school and provides secondary consultation to a broad range of schools, health and welfare agencies and community organisations. CAMHS has an active Consumer/Carer Advisory Group and a comprehensive research and teaching program.

### **Kildonan**

Kildonan provides the Reconnect Program including individual and family case management, counselling, mediation and conflict resolution case work with young people aged 12-18 and their families at risk of homelessness.

### **Analysis of Support Programs for those under 16 year olds**

There are a variety of organisations that provide youth counselling, and more that provide support to young people in a family context. Several support services have a specific focus on refugees and new arrivals.

Darebin Council Youth Services has a Youth Centre and a Youth Resource Centre that provide access to the Youth Connections program (delivered by Mission Australia) and some support services through Homework Clubs and an Access Project for African students.

However, only a couple of the services actively address re-engagement in education as a standalone activity.

Workers coming into contact with disengaged young people and those only marginally attached to schools report that they have very few referral options for those aged under 16. Program options are soon swamped by applicants as word of mouth spreads about the option. Further activities and programs need to be available to assist the re-engagement of large pool of young people that remain invisible to the service systems.

## **Summary of Findings**

Many young people under the age of 16 in the City of Darebin attend school on a very irregular basis. Government schools reported in excess of 120 young people in this situation.

There is a smaller and almost invisible group of young people under the age of 16 who are not attending school, few of whom interact with government or community agencies unless they get into trouble with police or come to the attention of services such as Child Protection.

Early school leavers Interviews undertaken for this project with young people also suggest that there are considerable numbers not attending, especially when it is identified there are often multiple instances of young people in the one family not attending school.

Many of the under 16 year olds disengaged from school have no contact with youth agencies or other support systems. Therefore it is almost certain that the 9 reported by Darebin agencies as not attending school in 2011 understates the actual extent of complete school disengagement among 10 to 15 year olds.

When re-engagement with education does occur, it is frequently the result of word of mouth peer referrals to programs such as the Pavilion School.

One of the factors that make it extremely difficult to establish the extent of school non-attendance for this age group is that Government agencies will not release data citing privacy legislative requirements. Since data is not shared even between government agencies, the effect is to keep the extent of school disengagement hidden from public view. The focus of Government data collection on school disengagement commences at 15 years of age, when the evidence is that some young people have not been going to school for several years by that time.

Based on the available data and interviews, the majority of those disengaged from school appear to be in the 14-15 year old age group, but there are some cases in which disengagement has occurred by 11 or 12 years of age. This is consistent with Victoria Police and Juvenile Justice data that also indicates that most contact occurs from age 14, and particularly age 15.

More effective integrated tracking mechanisms from primary school and beyond would assist in more accurately quantifying how many people under 16 are not attending school.

### **Primary to Secondary Schools Transition**

The primary to secondary transition process is a transition point at which some young people who are already marginally engaged at primary school cease regular school attendance before any significant relationships with secondary school staff have been developed. Case studies undertaken for this project illustrate this issue clearly. These young people can sometimes be identified by their previous patterns of irregular attendance across the primary school years.

The transition involves a move to what is usually a much larger secondary school. Establishing a strong relationship with one or more key school staff members takes time and some students are gone before this occurs. Policy and program connections and supports in the primary to secondary transition are weak.

### **Partnerships to provide early applied learning options**

There is a need for practical applied learning options available from at least the beginning of secondary school. The most frequent suggestion from currently or formerly disengaged young people that were interviewed was for more applied learning options to be provided earlier than the VCAL or pre-VCAL programs currently available.

When young people who have been disengaged for lengthy periods become eligible at 15 or 16 for enrolment in VCAL programs they often decide to return to education and training through community or TAFE programs.

These programs provide a less formal learning environment more flexible options and still work to address literacy and numeracy skill development.

The learning environment also needs to be kept to a small class size so that strong personal relations have a chance of being established between students, staff and parents. The first point of re-engagement must be small scale and capable of providing the level of intense support required for the particular individual.

Schools are unlikely to be able to offer these options on their own. Partnerships with organisations that have the potential to offer young people exposure to applied learning opportunities at an early age are most likely to provide curriculum of interest to students at risk of disengagement.

### **Data Collection**

As per the Moreland Under16 Report “Invisible and Ineligible”<sup>20</sup> to capture information on when and how young people cease attending school we propose development of a standard interview template that could be used by each agency that comes into contact with a young person who is re-engaging with education or other programs.

The information could be periodically collated to identify patterns of disengagement and opportunities for strengthening the service system.

Repeating the process of data collection from schools on patterns of non-attendance among the under 16 age group will enable longer term trends to be monitored and help develop a focus on engagement issues for this age group.

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<sup>20</sup> U/16: Invisible & Ineligible...The Moreland Under 16 Project

Resolving the blocking of access to data by government agencies most likely to interact with young people who are not attending school will provide a much more complete picture as to the extent of complete school disengagement. Surveying only the community agencies with which those under 16 come into contact provides a limited insight into the full extent of disengagement.

## **Strategies to improve engagement of those under 16.**

The following recommendations come under four distinct areas for action in order to improve education outcomes for young people in Darebin.

### **Data Collection - Creating an evidence base**

1. (a) Improve local data collection processes to enable more accurate identification of young people under the age of 16 who are not attending school.
  - Develop an agreed data collection approach with Principals from Government, Catholic and Independent schools and Community Agencies in Darebin.
  - Identify and collect data on attendance of all students in Darebin on an annual basis.
  - Advocate for participation in data collection by Victorian Government Department of Human Services
- (b) Develop a coordinated approach across the Northern Melbourne region to collect attendance data highlighting the numbers of young people under the age of 16 who are not attending school.

### **Reengagement in Education**

2. Schools and agencies work collaboratively with Youth Connections to develop a common strategy to identify and prioritise young people at risk of disengaging from education and integrate this strategy within existing school initiatives
3. Investigate developing a Darebin based engagement program that maintains a positive level of education engagement which includes wellbeing support to prepare the young people for re-entry into the education system.

### **Personalised and Applied Learning Frameworks**

4. Build the capacity of secondary schools in partnership with peak learning organisations to provide all students with personalised flexible and responsive learning options.
5. Develop alternative learning strategies and frameworks for applied learning options for students in middle years (Years 7 to 9) through partnerships with schools and vocationally focussed organisations.

## **Primary Secondary Transitions**

6. Develop a systematic primary and secondary transition process that supports effective student transition and provides support to those most at risk by establishing a good practice framework across schools.
7. Establish school community partnership models to develop and increase the capacity of schools to communicate and support families (parents and carers) and young people effectively transition from primary to secondary school. This should include practical actions and strategies to assist families to support their children to remain engaged in education at school.

## References

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<http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/>

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Darebin Environmental Scan July 2011, Inner Northern LLEN

Davies M, Lamb S, and Doecke E, Strategic Review of Effective Re-engagement models for Disengaged Learners, University of Melbourne, DEECD 2011

Department of Planning and Community Development, Victoria in Future 2008 Projections  
[http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0013/32233/Moreland.pdf](http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/32233/Moreland.pdf)

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KPMG, Re-engaging Our Kids Framework for Education Provision to Children and Young People at Risk of Disengaging or Disengaged from School, DEECD 2009

*Out of Home Care Education Commitment*, A Partnering Agreement between Department of Human Services, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and Independent Schools Victoria, published by DEECD Melbourne August 2011

Family School Partnership Framework DEEWR 2008

U/16: Invisible & Ineligible...The Moreland Under 16 Project, 2011 Inner Northern LLEN

# Attachment 1 – Non School Agency Data Collection

## Darebin Under 16 Project Data Collection

The “Darebin Under 16 Project” is attempting to identify as precisely as possible the number of young people aged between 10-15 years who are disengaged from education and training in the City of Darebin. We are sending you this data request on the basis that your organisation has some contact with young people in this age range who may be disengaged from school, or are at serious risk of disengagement.

The project is being managed by the Asquith Group on behalf of the Inner Northern LLEN, and the NMIT Youth Connections program.

### Time frame

- We are seeking data on clients assisted last year between 1<sup>st</sup> January and 30<sup>th</sup> December 2011.

### Age Range

- We are seeking information on clients aged 10 to 15 years of age in 2011. (Those born between 1 February 1995 – 1 February 2001).

### Residing in Darebin

- We are seeking information on those living in the City of Darebin (see postcodes below)
  - 3070, 3071, 3072 (Northcote, Reservoir, Preston)
  - 3078 (Alphington, Fairfield)
  - 3083, 3085 (Bundoora, Kingsbury, Macleod)

Sufficient data is being collected to enable the project to clarify whether young people are being counted only once or multiple times when we compare data provided by other agencies and services.

Please include data on any individuals placed on program waiting lists.

**We will not identify individual agency data in the report.**

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Please save the document as a new file, and email this file to:

[asquithgroup@ozemail.com.au](mailto:asquithgroup@ozemail.com.au)

**by 30 September 2012.**

Queries can be directed to Peter Kellock at the Asquith Group on 0412 342 637, or 9859 0342.

- Clients assisted last year between 1<sup>st</sup> January and 30<sup>th</sup> December 2011
- Who were born between 1 February 1995 – 1 February 2001
- And were living in the City of Darebin

	Date of Birth	Male or Female	Postcode	Initial of Surname	Still attending school? (Yes/No)	Language spoken at home
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						
15						
16						
17						
18						
19						
20						

(If more than 20 clients have been assisted in 2011, please copy table and complete additional details)

Please save the document as a new file, and email this file to:

[asquithgroup@ozemail.com.au](mailto:asquithgroup@ozemail.com.au)

**by 30 September 2012.**

Thank You

## Attachment 2 – School Data Collection

### Darebin Under 16 Project Data Collection

The “Darebin Under 16 Project” is attempting to identify as precisely as possible the number of young people aged between 10-15 years who are disengaged from education and training in the City of Darebin. We are sending you this data request on the basis that your school has some students in this age range who may have become disengaged from school, or are at serious risk of disengagement.

The project is being managed by the Asquith Group on behalf of the Inner Northern LLEN and the NMIT Youth Connections program.

#### Time frame

- We are seeking data on students enrolled last year between 1<sup>st</sup> Jan and 30<sup>th</sup> Dec 2011.

#### Age Range

- We are seeking information on students aged 10 to 15 years of age in 2011. (Those born between 1 February 1995 – 1 February 2001).

#### Residing in Darebin

- We are seeking information on those living in the City of Darebin (see postcodes below)
  - 3070, 3071, 3072 (Northcote, Reservoir, Preston)
  - 3078 (Alphington, Fairfield)
  - 3083, 3085 (Bundoora, Kingsbury, Macleod)

Sufficient data is being collected to enable the project to clarify whether young people are being counted only once or multiple times when we compare data provided by other agencies and services.

### We will not identify individual school or agency data in the report.

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When the following sections have been completed please **save the document as a new file**, and email this file to:

[asquithgroup@ozemail.com.au](mailto:asquithgroup@ozemail.com.au)

**by 13 September 2012.**

Queries can be directed to Peter Kellock at the Asquith Group on 0412 342 637, or 9859 0342.

Please provide details for students aged between 10 to 15 years of age (i.e. born between 1 February 1995 – 1 February 2001).

**Students aged between 10 to 15 years who average school non-attendance of more than 40% between January-December 2011.**

	Date of Birth	Male or Female	Current Postcode	Initial Surname	of	Re-enrolled 2012? (Yes/No)
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						

**Students aged between 10 to 15 years who average school non-attendance of between 20%-40% between January- December 2011.**

	Date of Birth	Male or Female	Current Postcode	Initial Surname	of	Re-enrolled 2012? (Yes/No)
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						
15						
16						
17						
18						
19						
20						

**Students aged 10 to 15 years expelled or asked to leave school between February 2011 – December 2011.**

	Date of Birth	Male or Female	Current Postcode	Initial Surname of
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				

**Students aged 10 to 15 years who were still enrolled but were unable to be contacted.**

	Date of Birth	Male or Female	Current Postcode	Initial Surname of
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				

**2011 Student Enrolment**

	Male	Female	Total	Number of these 2011 students who did <u>not</u> re-enrol in 2012
<b>Year 7</b>				
<b>Year 8</b>				
<b>Year 9</b>				
<b>Year 10</b>				

When the following sections have been completed please **save the document as a new file**, and email this file to: [asquithgroup@ozemail.com.au](mailto:asquithgroup@ozemail.com.au)

**by 13 September 2012.**

Thank You.

## Attachment 3 – Structured Interview Format, Young Parents and Parents

### Young people aged under 16 not going to school

- How old are you now?
- How old were you when you began to regularly not go to school? How long has it been since you last went?
- What caused you to stop going to school regularly? (Describe what happened)
- What do you do when you aren't going to school? How do you spend your time?
- Do you know many other people your age not going to school? How many?
- What programs or services have you gone to since you stopped going to school?
- Where and how do you get information about what options and services are available to you?
- What would help you go back to school or to somewhere else to learn useful skills?
- If you have returned to school or training, what helped get you started again? (*skip to the next question if you haven't gone back*)
- Is there anything that you miss about school?
- Does not going to school have any effect on you (or on your family)?