



## ***U16: Invisible & Ineligible...***

# **The Moreland Under 16 Project**



Moreland City Council



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# Executive Summary

## 1. Introduction

The Moreland Under 16 Project is a joint project initiative between the Inner Northern Youth Connections (INYC) consortium (NMIT, Moreland City Council, The Salvation Army, Crossroads and Brunswick Youth Services) and Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network (INLLEN).

The City of Moreland covers the suburbs of Brunswick, Coburg, Fawkner, Glenroy, Hadfield, Oak Park, Pascoe Vale and Gowanbrae. Young people in the City of Moreland aged 11-25 years make up 18.7% of the Moreland population. Whilst the majority of young people are born in Australia, they represent a diversity of backgrounds and a variety of cultural groups.

Data for Moreland provides some alarming characteristics:

- Poor educational outcomes
- High youth unemployment
- High levels of disconnection
- Reduced health outcomes (and in particular mental health)
- Increased trends in anti-social behaviour.

In particular, Moreland has low levels of educational attainment amongst young people under 16 years. The 2006 census figures show that 12.8% of students in Moreland had left school in Year 8 or below, this is much higher than the Melbourne Statistical Division (MSD) average of 7.8%. The prevalence of disadvantage and disengagement is particularly concentrated in Moreland's northern suburbs, Glenroy and Fawkner.

The implementation of the Youth Connections Program in 2010 and Moreland Youth Commitment served to reinforce concerns in the community about poor educational outcomes for young people in this age group. The Moreland Under 16 Project was undertaken to gain an understanding of the extent of disengagement in Moreland and develop informed responses to the issue.

## 2. Project Aims

The Moreland Under 16 Project aimed to:

- Identify the number of young people under 16 years of age in the City of Moreland 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.

## 3. Project Scope

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

1. completely disengaged; or
2. whose attendance exceeded one or two days a week, indicating a potential for disengagement.

## 4. Research Findings

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

The data relates to Government schools in Moreland involving 5 secondary schools only.

A total enrolment in Government schools in Moreland for those under 16 years is estimated at approximately 2060 young people, of this group research indicates that:

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

Government schools reported;

- 6.25% (82 young people) are missing one day of school each week or 40 days per year.
- 2.3% (47 young people) are missing more than 2 days of school each week or 80 days per year.
- In total of 129 young people in Government schools in Moreland are missing from school an average of one day or more per week, 40 days or more per year which is more than three times the average student.

**A concerning number of young people under 16 years have completely disengaged from school:**

- Government schools reported 7 expulsions by August 2011.
- A further 13 students are enrolled but unable to be contacted.
- A standard period of complete disengagement is between 18 months to two years.
- Koorie Early School Leavers Program in the region reported 60 clients engaged in their program had dropped out of school by Year 8 or below upon entry into the program and had been out of school for several years.

**Many young people under the age of 16 who are disengaged from school have limited or no contact with community or youth agencies:**

- 21 young people were reported by Moreland agencies as having contact with services.
- Of the 21 young people, 16 reported as not attending school.
- Young people accessing services were predominantly male and from English speaking backgrounds.

**Majority of those young people disengaged from school appear to be 14-15 years old.**

- This is consistent with Victoria Police and Juvenile Justice data where the majority of contact occur at ages 14 and 15 years.
- There were reported cases of young people who had disengaged as early as 11 years.
- Patterns of irregular attendance commences early in primary schools.
- Late arrival and non-attendance commences in Grade 1 and continues through to early years.
- Once students have ceased attending school they are out of school for several years.
- Multiple instances of school disengagement in the one family is not uncommon.

**There are few alternative education options for those aged under 16 in Moreland.**

- Current programs offered are available for those 15 years and over.
- Teaching Units offer short term assistance only.
- DOXA School offering support to 12-14 year olds is now closed.
- Evidence of a 'waiting pattern for up to 3 years' for those disengaged in Years 9 or below.
- Limited alternative education service options exist in the northern end of the LGA where the youth population is concentrated and need is greatest.

## 5. Contributing Factors

Interviews with young people, parent and teachers indicated that the following factors increased the likelihood of disengagement:

**Expulsion:** Being expelled from a previous school, then commencing at a new school for a month or two, and then ceasing to attend altogether;

**Transition:** Transitioning from primary to secondary school, attending the secondary school for a short period and then disengaging altogether;

**High Mobility:** Young people moving from another region into Moreland or from Moreland to elsewhere and then returning, and in the process ceasing to attend school;

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

**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 of 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.

**Negative School Experience of Parents:** Parents themselves have had unsuccessful or unsatisfactory experiences with their own schooling. This negative experience can lead to families finding it difficult to relate to and engage with schools, and a tendency to place less importance on their child's attendance and engagement with school.

**Young People as Carers:** Young people remain at home to act as carers to family members. This is particularly true in instances where the parent has a mental illness and /or drug and alcohol dependence;

**Informal employment:** Young people having to work in the family business or contribute to the family income;

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

## 6. Data Collection Issues

- The data used to inform research findings does not include data from Independent and Catholic schools in Moreland and key State and Commonwealth Departments.
- 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.
- The lack of options contributes to the invisibility of this group of disengaged young people, as they are ineligible for many alternative education programs or 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 have not been going to school for several years.
- As with the education services, some of the welfare and community organisations indicate that a significant component of their client group are predominantly male and English speaking and mostly residents of Hume or surrounding LGAs. This suggests that young woman and those young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are much less likely to access mainstream services and therefore are underrepresented in the data collection.
- Research findings significantly understate the extent of disengagement in Moreland. Interviews with families and agencies indicate frequent instances of contact with families in which there are several children under 16 years who are not attending school. This is particularly true for those young people and families from Indigenous backgrounds, where there may be higher levels of mobility.

## 7. What Works

Research suggests 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 future opportunities

Young people interviewed in Moreland say there are a number of enablers that paved the way to helping them re-engage with education:

**Supportive Relationships:** The importance of having a supportive relationship with staff involved in the re-engagement process. 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 VCAL prior to Year 10.

**Flexible Learning Environments:** Opportunities to combine part-time school with other activities can assist some young people teetering 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 may be equally useful 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.

## **8. Recommendations**

- 1. Develop two pilot demonstration projects with local schools to improve student engagement with a focus on:**
  - Primary to secondary transition
  - Parent engagement in young person's learning using the Family – School Partnership Framework.
  - Applied learning options for Years 7 to 9
  - Flexible learning options, e.g. part time enrolment.
  
- 2. Develop a coordinated early intervention strategy focused on effective case management approach to support students under 16 at risk of disengagement from education and training in partnership with Youth Connections and INLLEN.**
  
- 3. Improve the collection of data to inform future planning through the:**
  - Development of an agreed data collection approach with local schools and agencies in Moreland;
  - Annual collection of relevant data (in terms 2 or 3), in partnership with Youth Connections and INLLEN;
  - Promotion of Catholic and Independent schools and government agencies to participate in the annual data collection process.

# The Moreland Under 16 Project

## 1. Introduction

The Moreland Under 16 Project was commissioned by the consortium partners of the Inner Northern Youth Connections program and by the Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network (INLLEN). Youth Connections is a Commonwealth Government initiative available to young people aged 13-19 who are disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from school, family and/or the community. INLLEN is funded by the State and Commonwealth Governments under the School, Business and Community Partnership Program aimed at improving education outcomes for young people 10-19 years of age.

The Moreland Under 16 Project was developed to:

- identify how many young people under 16 years of age in the City of Moreland 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 originated from the concern raised by the Moreland Youth Commitment and staff in the Youth Connections program operating across the inner northern region of Melbourne that there may be significant numbers of disengaged young people who were under the age of 16. Local agencies such as the Salvation Army and Brunswick Youth Services indicated that they had increasing waiting lists from young people under the age of 16 for entry to their support program.

The project was focussed on young people aged between 10 and 16 years who were both completely disengaged, as well as those whose attendance record at school exceeded one or two days a week on average (indicating a potential for eventual disengagement).

An initial scoping report on educational disengagement among under 16 year olds commissioned by Youth Connections across the northern region of Melbourne in 2010 provided evidence of quite large numbers of disengaged young people under 16 years of age when the whole of the northern region was considered.<sup>1</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

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<sup>1</sup> *Report on educational disengagement of young people under 15 years of age in the Northern region, Combined Northern Region Youth Connections Consortium 2010*

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 invisibility of this group of disengaged young people, as they are ineligible for many support programs as well as income support, consequently remaining largely invisible to the education system and to other agencies unless they come into contact with the Department of Human Services workers and others dealing directly with their families.

This reflects 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>2</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 13 local agencies and 5 Government schools were used to map the service system, canvas 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 5 parents and 12 young people contacted through local agencies were arranged and used to identify key issues and develop the case studies included in this report.

### **Data**

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 Moreland on young people at risk of disengagement, and on those in the process of becoming disengaged. Government schools and the northern regional office of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) were all highly co-operative and provided the requested data in de-identified form. Two schools from the independent schools sector and two from the Catholic education sector did not participate. Therefore the schools data relates only to the government school system.

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

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<sup>2</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

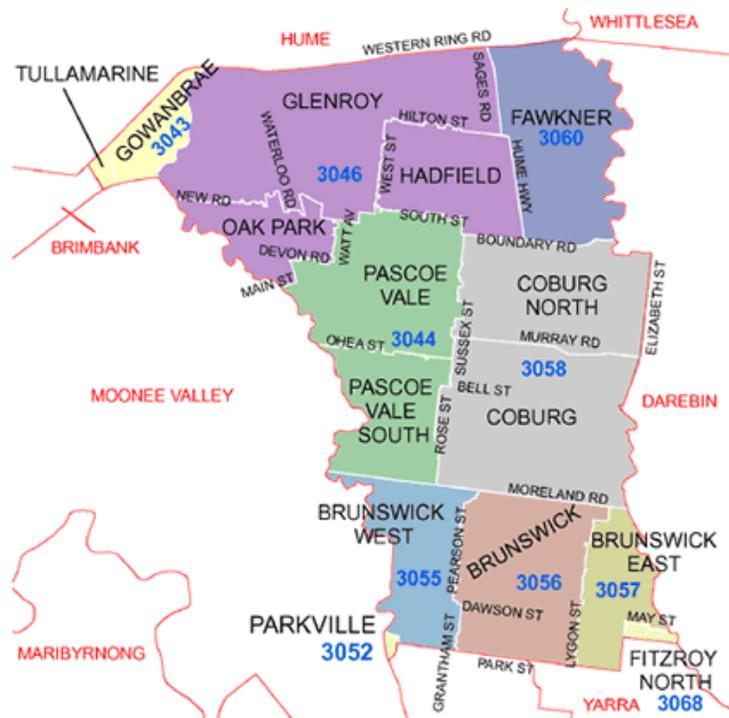
for profit organisations that might come into contact with this group of young people, including the police, Centrelink and state Department of Human Services, local government and agencies specifically funded to support young people.

Unfortunately, while most local agencies provided data in the format requested, the key State and Commonwealth Departments with access to data on 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 is much lower than the actual numbers. Interviews with families 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.

## 2. Profile of the City of Moreland

Moreland is a municipality in the inner north of Melbourne. It covers 50.9 square kilometres and is one of Melbourne’s most populous municipalities.

The City of Moreland covers the suburbs of Brunswick, Coburg, Fawkner, Glenroy, Gowanbrae, Hadfield, Oak Park, and Pascoe Vale.



### **Number of those under 16**

The ABS census reports on population groupings of 10-14 year olds and then 15-19 year olds. The 2006 census recorded that there were 6,883 young people (4.8 % of the overall population) aged between 10-14 years in the City of Moreland.<sup>3</sup>

The population is predominantly Australian born. 86.3% of 5-14 year olds in Moreland were born in Australia.

The main cultural groups for those born outside Australia across the 10-19 year old age group are:

- China 2.2%
- India 1.6%
- New Zealand 1.3%
- Lebanon 0.8%
- Sri Lanka 0.6%
- Iraq 0.6%

Adolescent young people identifying as Aboriginal in Moreland at the 2006 census totalled 92 (out of a total of 810 indigenous adolescent young people 10-17 years across the Northern Metropolitan region).

Aboriginal persons in Moreland comprise 0.5 percent of the overall Moreland population (lower than the percentage across Victoria of 0.6 percent) but adolescents comprise 14.7% of the Moreland indigenous population (compared with 7.9% in the overall population).

The 10-15 year old youth population is mainly concentrated at the northern end of Moreland in the suburbs including Coburg and beyond.<sup>4</sup>

### **Level of educational achievement in Moreland**

The 2006 census shows that 12.8% of students in Moreland left school in Year 8 or below (compared with an average across Melbourne of 7.8% having left school in Year 8 or earlier).

The inner northern Youth Transition Support Initiative (YTSI) data reinforced this. YTSI supported young people aged 15 to 19 years who had been out of school for 3 months or more. In 2010, clients reported their highest level of education as Year 8 or below in 25 instances. Of these 22 had completed Year 8, while three had only completed Grade 5 or Grade 6.

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<sup>3</sup> ABS Census 2006 data

<sup>4</sup> Victoria in Future 2008 Projections

### 3. Attendance at school

The first set of data collected for this project was the 2011 patterns of school attendance. The data collected shows that there are significant numbers of young people between the ages of 10 and 15 in the City of Moreland 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 Moreland by the four year levels that cover the age range of 12 to 15 year olds. These are as follows:

**Table 1: Enrolment in government schools in Moreland 2010**

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
Government schools	542	593	591	674.4

Of the 2,400 enrolled in govt schools in Years 7 to 10, half of the Year 10 cohort will turn 16 at mid year, so it is assumed that around 2,060 will be aged between 12 and 15.

Data provided by government secondary schools indicates there are at least 47 young people in this age group attending school on average less than 3 days a week, and a further 82 attending less than 4 days a week. A total of 129 young people across Moreland attending government schools are missing at least one day of school on average each week.

Anecdotal information from other agencies working with families in the City of Moreland such as Merri Community Health Services also indicates that there are many students whose attachment to school is tenuous.

Based on the data reported by the schools 6.25% of this age group are missing an average of one day of school each week, and 2.3% are missing more than 2 days of school each week on average.

**Table 2: Average 2011 school attendance less than 3 days a week (over 40% non-attendance)**

	Aged 12 -14	Total aged under 16	English spoken at home
School A	2	7	6 out of 7
School B	2	7	6 out of 7
School C	2	3	3 out of 3
School D	1	3	2 out of 3
School E	7	22	8 out of 22
School F	0	1	Not reported
School G	0	4	Not reported
	<b>14</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>25 out of 43</b>

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

	Aged 12 -14	Total aged under 16	English spoken at home
School A	11	23	8 out of 23
School B	2	7	6 out of 7
School C	0	6	5 out of 6
School D	1	3	3 out of 3
School E	25	43	17 out of 43
School F	0	1	Not reported
School G	0	4	Not reported
	<b>39</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>39 out of 82</b>

**Expulsions**

There were seven expulsions reported by schools in 2011 till the end of August. Those expelled from schools are all male and are either from English speaking or Arabic speaking backgrounds.

**Uncontactable students**

A further 13 students are of particular concern. These young people are still enrolled at government schools in 2011, but are reported by the schools as being 'unable to be contacted' for a variety of reasons. Backgrounds of these young people include a strong representation of Indigenous students, but otherwise are still mainly from English speaking backgrounds. They include one 13 year old, and three 14 year olds.

**Table 4: Students reported as enrolled in 2011 but unable to be contacted**

<b>13 total</b>	Age	Gender	Language at home
	4 who are aged 14	Females 4	English 11
	9 who are aged 15	Males 2	Turkish 1
		Unidentified 7	Samoan 1

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. In addition school staff at both primary and secondary schools report that some parents from middle eastern countries regularly remove their children from school during the northern hemisphere summer to return to the country of origin, establishing a pattern of intermittent attendance with associated learning issues. This occurs across both the primary and the secondary school years.

#### **4. Disengaged 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 following transitions sometimes led to young people ceasing to attend school.

- Some who had been expelled from a previous school, 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 moved from another location into Moreland, or moved from Moreland to elsewhere and then returned, and in the process ceased attending 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.

##### **High mobility**

The third trend, that of ceasing to attend due to movement in and out of the region, is particularly a factor with indigenous families where there appears to be comparatively high levels of mobility. 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 undertaken with parents and indigenous young people for this research. Movement between extended family groups frequently involved not attending school for those aged under 16.

##### **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 support services such as Brunswick Youth Services whose

clients have typically been out of school for such periods prior to enrolling with their programs.

The agencies with whom disengaged young people are most likely to come into contact, particularly DHS at both Commonwealth and State level, 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 Moreland. Nine 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. Through family networks and family support agencies, we were able to identify a further ten to twelve in this age group not attending school at all.

However, 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.

**Little contact with support services**

The numbers who make their way to the available support services appear to be quite small. Five local services reported on young people from Moreland being assisted in this age group in 2011

**Table 5: Moreland Agencies reporting on clients under the age of 16 assisted in Jan-Aug 2011.**

	Females	Males	Total
NMIT Youth Connections	2	6	8
Brunswick Youth Services	3	5	8
City of Moreland Youth Services	2	10	12
Salvation Army Reconnect Program	1	0	1
Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning	0	0	0
	<b>8</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>29</b>

There were 8 duplicate records in the data supplied through NMIT Youth Connections, Brunswick Youth Services and City of Moreland Youth Services (as a result of the same young person being reported through various programs), so the eventual client total for the 10-15 age group across these five services totalled 21 young people.

**Age of those disengaged**

The issue of non-engagement is most significant amongst the 14 and 15 year old population. One assisted by local agencies is 13 years old, 6 being assisted by local agencies were 14 year olds, and the remaining fourteen were 15 year olds. Once students have ceased attending, they report being out of school for several years.

**Table 6: Client age of those under 16 supported by Moreland Agencies**

<b>Age of client</b>	<b>Number</b>
12 years old or younger	0
13 years old	1
14 years old	6
15 years old	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>

They are predominantly male and from English speaking backgrounds (which is reasonably consistent with the overall make-up of the Moreland youth population). Only three of these came from households in which a language other than English was spoken at home. Of the 21, there were 16 reported as not attending school.

### **Data Issues**

No data returns were provided from the following organisations: The Department of Human Services (Victoria) which includes Juvenile Justice and Residential Care; or from the Commonwealth Department of Human Services (which includes Centrelink). The lack of information available from these Departments 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.

### **Multiple instances in same family**

Interviews we conducted with Health Services Family Team workers and with some family members with disengaged children indicates that it is not uncommon to find multiple numbers of disengaged young people in the one family. Patterns of poor attendance and families functioning in an isolated manner are frequently evident from early on in primary school.

Home schooling is an available option for families and young people who do not want to attend school. The extent to which home schooling is being used is difficult to determine, as once again government authorities restrict the data that can be released. For the whole metropolitan Melbourne region there are 100 young people aged 10, 129 aged 11, 108 aged 12, and 106 aged 13, and 95 aged 14 registered as being schooled at home ( a total of 538 in 2011). Estimates across Moreland might be in the range of 40-60 being home schooled.

Two of the main factors behind the decision to use home schooling according to the registering authority (the VRQA) are parents who reject secular education and also particular religious schools on the grounds of their religious beliefs (the fastest growing group) as well as those who withdraw children due to learning disabilities (including conditions such as Aspergers).

## 5. Case Studies

### Case Study 1

#### **Whole family disengaged from school**

*A 15 year old boy from an indigenous background stopped attending school in 2010 while in Year 8, and has now missed 18 months of school.*

*On a regular school day when he was interviewed, he was at home with his single mother and four other brothers and male relatives all of whom were of compulsory school age with the exception of one who was 18 years old. The mother confirmed that three of her sons were aged between 10 and 15 years old, and none of them were currently attending school. "Some factors are to do with school, some to do with home" she says. They appear to like hanging around together at home, playing music, computer games and generally hanging around together.*

*He had been attending a small local school for indigenous students but stopped attending because he didn't enjoy going there after a while. He said that it lacked variety and stimulation. He had enjoyed some of the practical classes such as woodworking which produced traditional shields and other products, but those classes stopped. He is not engaged in any support program or alternative programs.*

*He has a brother aged 14 who also has not been going to school for 18 months or so and who has recently moved up the country to live with his father.*

*According to his mother, he will be moving to regional Victoria shortly to live with father's cousin in a regional centre. He is positive about the move and there is some discussion about going back to school once he is up there, but no practical steps have been taken to enrol him in any school at this time.*

## Case Study 2

### Two years out of school

*A young female from an English speaking background was expelled from school in Moreland when she was in Year 8. She says that she could not cope with full time school, experienced a lot of conflict with teachers and got “harassed about wearing jewellery and make up”.*

*She was briefly enrolled in another school but hardly attended, and then ceased going to school altogether. She was also having some conflict with her mother around the same time, so she did not go home much, but spent much of her time sleeping over at friends’ houses. She was out of school for between 18 months and 2 years. She got by on money provided by her mother to enable her to support herself*

*After a period of time she was interested in returning to her former school part-time in year 10, but the school indicated that she would have to return to school full-time to re-enrol, which she wasn’t prepared to consider. Having heard ‘on the grapevine’ about Sydney Road Community School, she considered this school as an option but never got around to doing anything about contacting them. Otherwise she didn’t attend any programs or seek assistance from other services in Moreland*

*Now, at the age of 15, she has enrolled in a community VCAL program which she heard about from friends, and hopes to later obtain a hairdressing apprenticeship. When asked what would have helped her remain in school when she was in Year 8, the main point she made was the need for practical applied programs like VCAL to be available at that stage of school, as well as a more supportive and flexible school environment.*

### Case Study 3

#### **Disengaging student**

*A fifteen year old student enrolled at one of the government secondary schools has not attended school for over five weeks. The school welfare staff have been attempting to contact the student and their parents, but the contact phone numbers are no longer being answered and the house where they were living has been vacated.*

*Though still formally enrolled at the school, the student is on the verge of slipping entirely out of contact with the school. Nothing has been heard from the parents of the student as to their situation. School staff believe they are doing as much as they realistically can do to get in touch.*

## Case Study 4

### Isolated at home

*Two young people from an Arabic speaking background born to a drug affected mother have learning disability issues. They are being raised by their grandmother who was formerly a teacher (primarily in religious studies).*

*The 13 year old girl who has significant cognitive impairment has been home schooled since she was in Grade 2, when her grandmother made the decision to withdraw her from primary school. Initially home schooled, the extent to which tuition is actually occurring has diminished over time. Despite her level of cognitive impairment, the girl just fails to meet the threshold for eligibility for special school.*

*Her brother, now 16 year, stopped attending mainstream school at the age of about 11 years, and has some moderate learning difficulties, especially in expressing himself in writing. Both young people were registered for Home Schooling. Their grandmother keeps the children at home almost entirely and tries to give them school work at the appropriate level. She feels pressured to get them to do some schoolwork each day even when the young people do not want to do it. She has little support from the rest of the family.*

*The grandmother is of the view that mainstream schools are unable to cater for the needs of these two young people, and neither were eligible for special education (though the 13 year old is close to the cut off score for eligibility).*

*Both children are relatively isolated and spent years out of school without coming to the attention of support services and youth programs. Kept at home by the carer and rarely leaving the house, a primary focus has been their religious education. The now 16 year old youth only goes out to visit the local Mosque and then returns home.*

*Increasingly isolated, the 16 year old eventually attended a mental health service that subsequently referred him to Youth Connections. A focus is now being made to attempt to get these young people to engage with services outside the home (eg a local art workshops for the 13 year old).*

## **6. Contributing Factors**

The nature of secondary schools, including their size, the available curriculum, their relative flexibility, and the relationship between students and staff are one influence on the process of disengagement. However, young people are dealing with a range of issues and circumstances that can also strongly contribute to not going to school. These include the following:

### **Disability**

A contributing factor to school disengagement are high levels of disability that mainstream schools are unable to deal with, but where the young people just miss out on eligibility for special school education. (eg. young people with autism related disorders such as Aspergers which provide challenging behaviour but where IQ levels may be above the level of special school cut off). In some cases parents opt either to remove their children from school or use Home Schooling as an alternative.

### **Ineffective Parenting and Family 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 of 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.

### **Young People as Carers**

Young people are also 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.

### **Negative School Experience of Parents**

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.

### **Informal employment**

Welfare staff in several schools reported that there are a young people under the age of 16 who are out of school due to working in family businesses in the black economy. The extent to which this occurs is very difficult to ascertain.

### **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.

## **7. Assisting re-engagement**

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>5</sup>

### **Making Connection**

The first requirement is the need to 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.

### **Welfare Needs**

The second requirement, 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.

### **Appropriate Learning**

The third requirement is 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.

### **Relevant pathways**

The fourth requirement is a focus on 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>5</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. Technically, part-time schooling is already an option with the approval of the DECD Regional Office. However, some schools within the region reportedly are reluctant to consider part-time schooling as an option.

## **8. Services to support young people in Moreland**

### **Alternative Education Options**

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.

### **Appropriate teaching and learning**

The learning environment must be less formal providing flexible options, while still addressing literacy and numeracy skill development needs. Making learning applied or hands-on increases the relevance of the learning for this group of young people.

### **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 develop supports for addressing personal wellbeing needs while helping the young person access the learning program appropriate to their needs.<sup>6</sup> An holistic approach developing a range of partnerships within a program help to meet 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

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<sup>6</sup> Davies M, Lamb S, and Doecke E, Strategic Review of Effective Re-engagement models for Disengaged Learners, University of Melbourne 2011

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 Moreland that combine these elements. The options that have been identified are as follows:

### **Teaching Units**

Teaching Units at Coburg and Brunswick 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 DOXA Program (ceased operating in mid 2011)**

The DOXA School, which formerly provided an option for 12 to 15 year olds in Moreland, closed in the middle of 2011. DOXA was an alternative education program for 11-14 year olds who were experiencing difficulties in mainstream schools. The model involved attendance for 6 months followed by a further 12 months of outreach support by DOXA workers. It functioned as a transition school attempting to bridge students between primary school and subsequent learning opportunities

### **The Island**

The Island is located in Coburg and is a small educational provider that offers VET Certificate 2 Trades in Horticulture, Kitchen Operations, Furniture and Cabinet Making, Building and Construction and Automotive for 15-18 year olds as well as VCAL options at Foundation and Intermediate level. In August 2011 the Island had 21 enrolments. Analysis of their current enrolments found only three current students under the age of 16 came from Moreland. The majority of their enrolments come from Hume, Banyule or the western region LGAs. The Island is currently operating at only half the capacity of 40 students and represents an under utilised resource located within Moreland. 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.

### **The Pavilion**

The Pavilion school is not located in Moreland, but operates in adjacent LGAs, with campuses in Preston and Mill Park providing 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. 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 re-commence their studies and start at the school.

They have approximately 160 students enrolled, but report that "*relatively few come from Moreland*" with most referrals from schools and other agencies in either Hume or Darebin.

### **Sydney Road Community School**

Sydney Road Community School in Brunswick provides a small scale educational environment for approximately 90 students from Year 7 to year 12. The school has a waiting list and admits young people based on their age and their existing enrolment in an attempt to ensure the stability of student groups within the school. Class sizes are kept particularly small in comparison to other secondary schools. The curriculum in Years 7-10 is drawn from the VELS learning domains of The Arts, English, Humanities, Maths and Science. As well as providing a solid generalist grounding there is an emphasis on encouraging student self-expression through music, art and film making. The school attempts to control the student mix and ensure that it has the resources to meet particular needs.

Most of the Sydney Road Community School enrolments are from the City of Moreland.

### **Ballerrt Mooroop College**

Ballerrt Mooroop College is a Koorie school based in Glenroy which has between 10- 20 students from Years 7 to 10. The College provides assistance and support to Koorie students primarily aged between 12 and 16.

The aim is to create pathways into secondary colleges, further education, traineeships, apprenticeships and employment appropriate to each student. One to one coaching is designed to address student needs. The current school enrolment are mainly residents from the Hume LGA, rather than from Moreland.

### **Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre**

Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre offers a community VCAL, but only accepts enrolments from students aged 15 years and 11 months.

In considering the education options for those under 16 in Moreland, mention also needs to be made of the “Internship Program” for Year 10 students that John Fawkner and Glenroy College are both delivering in 2011. The Internship Program is similar to a pre-VCAL program with work preparation components that enables students who are enrolled in these two schools to undertake practical applied learning at an earlier stage than the VCAL program (which is normally commenced at Year 11).

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

There are very few alternative education options for those aged under 16 in Moreland. For 15 year olds there are at least some options (e.g. The Island, the Pavilion), but for anyone under 15 there are almost none. The closure of DOXA earlier this year has removed one of the few options for the 12-14 age group.

### **Only short term assistance**

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. The Pavilion school provides an option for those aged 14 and above, but the location of the campuses in Preston and Mill Park results in most of their enrolments coming from young people who are not resident in Moreland. While the need for services is particularly strong at the northern end of the region, the main option for young people is Sydney Road Community School (located at the southern end of the LGA)

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) and/or go to TAFE 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 many youth related services that address particular barriers to educational and community engagement such as mental health services, disability services, 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 direct focus on engagement and re-engagement with education and training.

As with many of the 'alternative' education options, the youth support services available in Moreland are often assisting more young people from outside the LGA than from within Moreland itself. This is particularly so for services situated towards the northern end of the Moreland LGA where the youth population is concentrated.

#### **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 Metropolitan Institute of TAFE is the lead agent for the Inner Northern Youth Connections consortium, and many of the main agencies in the LGA that provide youth services are also members of the consortium. These agencies are the Salvation Army Crossroads, Brunswick Youth Services, and Moreland Youth Services.

Moreland Council Youth Services provides case management support to young people who are at risk of leaving or have recently disengaged (up to 3 months) from education, as part of the Youth Connections Program (Type 1).

The Salvation Army Crossroads and Brunswick Youth Services provide case management support young people who are not in education, training or employment. (Type 2 A & 2B)

Both Moreland Council Youth Services and The Salvation Army provide Type 3 Activities involving a range of programs and community initiatives to help find and engage disengaged young people into case management support.

The other key services located in or close to Moreland are:

**Anglicare Youth Services**

Anglicare primarily provides DHS funded services such as teenage foster care, crisis accommodation, case management support programs, youth mediation, family counselling, parent education and integrated family services, drug and alcohol services, and multicultural support.

**Arabic Welfare Inc.**

Arabic Welfare youth workers deliver programs for newly arrived young people through schools and the community; Their Moreland project focuses on strengthening parenting skills of Arabic speaking families dealing with adolescents. Arabic welfare also provide settlement support recreational and social group activities.

**Bert Williams Aboriginal Youth Services (Thornbury)**

Bert Williams have an early school leavers program that assists young Koorie people aged 10-20 years of age, and provides intensive culturally based assessment, case management and case work support to those who have disengaged from or are at risk of disengaging from education, training or employment and those in contact with the criminal justice system.

**Brunswick Youth Services (Salvos)**

BYS provides broad-based supports for young people aged 13-19 and a range of personal development, training and educational opportunities that are designed to create pathways back into education for young people who have become disengaged from mainstream systems. The service has a program for 13-16 year olds on 3 days a week which offers case management support. In partnership with NMIT they also provide a TAFE program which offers the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) for 15-20 year old 'at risk' young people who require extra assistance to restart their education, and Certificate 1, 2 and 3 in creative industries with an RTO partner (see below). Brunswick Youth Services is a member of the Youth Connections consortium.

**Youth Media Training studio Brunswick funded by Youthworx (Salvos)**

The program offers an 'access' component where young people can engage in activities or short projects without a further longer-term commitment. A more structured accredited training program is provided at Certificate I, II, and III levels. The Mirror Program is a youth centred, digital media training and life skills program for young people who are in contact with the justice system. The Mirror Program aims to support young people to think about their situation through the process of making a short film.

**Glenroy Library**

Glenroy Library offers a 'Finding My Place' program that aims to motivate students to remain in education through providing intensive career guidance and opportunities to explore careers in art, music, sport and fitness, and makeup. \*This program has recently discontinued due to resourcing issues at Glenroy College.

**Kildonan Uniting Care**

Kildonan provides an early intervention program addressing engagement with education, homelessness and family mediation. Kildonan also provides information and referral for young people and their families; school based programs (e.g. girls group, Pacific Islander community); recreational activity, independent living and transitional programs.

**Merri Community Health**

Merri Community Health provides generalist youth counselling for 12 -25 year olds, and hosts the School Focussed Youth Service

**Moreland Youth Services**

The City of Moreland Youth Services provides short term individual support for young people aged 11-25 years. In addition, the service delivers arts and community projects, holiday programs, organises youth summits and committees. Moreland Youth Services is a Youth Connections provider.

**Operation Newstart Northern (Collingwood)**

Operation Newstart provides students at risk of educational disengagement with a seven week program 4 days a week engaging them in outdoor adventure, life skills and vocational skills development

**Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre (Preston)**

Spectrum has a migrant and refugee focus, providing settlement, casework, holiday programs, family and parenting programs, and supporting leadership groups

**The Salvation Army Crossroads**

The Salvation Army 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. The Salvation Army is also a Youth Connections provider in the Moreland area.

**YouthWorx Media**

YouthWorx delivers media training to young people from marginalised backgrounds in a process of participation and development that seeks to reconnect them to community. YouthWorx is a project of Youth

Development Australia inc, a not for profit organisation that seeks to be a platform for change in youth work practice.

### **Victorian Arabic Social Services**

Victorian Arabic Social Services provides a range of programs and activities for young people across Melbourne which include sporting activities, mentoring, leadership courses, social engagement activities, radio and television programs, camps and trips and activities which aim to strengthen relationships between young people, their communities and service providers. There are employment related youth programs, but none with a specific focus on educational re-engagement.

### **Youth Support Service**

This service is being introduced in 2011 through YSAS and is designed to intervene and divert young people away from the Youth Justice system by providing holistic support to young people and their families for up to 6 months. The Youth Support Service targets 10-18 year olds who have had recent contact with Victoria Police and are not currently managed by Youth Justice or Child Protection.

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

As with the education services, some (though not all) of the welfare and community organisations providing support indicate that a significant component of their client group are residents of Hume or surrounding LGAs.

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

There are some short term re-engagement options such as Operation Newstart.

However, only a couple of the services actively address re-engagement in education as a standalone activity (for example, Brunswick Youth Services for the mainstream population and Bert Williams for indigenous young people) although others work collaboratively with specific schools on re-engagement and maintaining attachment (such as Merri Community Health and Moreland Council Youth Services).

Workers coming into contact with disengaged young people and those only marginally attached to schools reported that they had few referral options for those aged under 16. Services such as the YouthWorx Media in Brunswick are soon swamped by applicants as word of mouth spreads about the option. More programs and activities need to be available to assist the re-engagement of a large pool of young people that remain invisible to the service systems.

## 9. Summary of Findings

Many young people under the age of 16 in the City of Moreland attend school on an irregular basis. Government schools reported 87 young people on average missing from school at least 20% of the time, and another 47 missing from school at least 40% of the time.

There is a smaller and almost invisible group of young people in the 10-16 age group 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. Local agencies in Moreland identified only 16 young people who were known to be not attending school.

Interviews with those working with local families and interviews undertaken for this project with parents and young people suggest that there are considerably more young people not going to school, especially when it is clear that there are often multiple instances of young people not attending in the one family.

Many of the 10-16 year olds disengaged from school have no contact with youth agencies or other support systems. Only 16 were reported by Moreland agencies for 2011. When re-engagement with education does occur, it is frequently the result of word of mouth peer referrals to programs such as the Youth Media Training Studio or to 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. It appears that school disengagement may be an even greater issue in the Hume LGA (as many young people from Hume are being assisted by Moreland alternative education and youth support services).

### **Primary to Secondary School 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. These young people can regularly 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.

### **Applied Learning Options**

The lack of sustainable learning programs available in Moreland has been Noted, particularly at the northern end of the LGA.

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.

The model used by the Pavilion school (integrating social work and education skills in the staffing) provides a strong basis to develop a Moreland based model.

The Island School in Coburg is an under utilised facility, with a current enrolment at half the capacity of the site. It provides one opportunity for the vocational preparation facilities to be configured for a purpose other than (or in addition to) delivery of VCAL for those aged 15 and above.

### **Parent and family engagement**

The relationship between families and schools is a key factor that influences patterns of school attendance and engagement for younger students. Development of a pilot project with a small number of primary and secondary

schools in Moreland would assist the development of an appropriate model that could address some of the key welfare and outreach requirements for re-engagement identified in Section 6 of this report.

The Inner Northern Parent and Family Engagement Project has identified the need to develop a number of pilot projects with schools to build effective school community partnerships to support parental engagement in young people's learning. Schools need to be central to development of such a pilot, but critically need the assistance of a variety of community service agencies to assist them to create an effective and sustainable approach.

The Family - School Partnership Framework developed in 2008 by the national parent bodies in Australia – Australian Council for State School Organisations (ACSSO) and the Australian Parents Council (APC) and the Australian Government provides a model for this work.

*'High levels of parental and community involvement is strongly related to improved student learning, attendance and behaviour. Family involvement can have a major impact on student learning, regardless of the social or cultural background of the family. Family involvement in schools is therefore central to high quality education and is part of the core business of schools'.*

*The aim of the Family-School Partnerships Framework is to encourage sustainable and effective partnerships between all members of the school community, including teachers, families, and students'.<sup>7</sup>*

There are various models that could assist the development of more effective relationships between schools and parents.

These include the following:

- An idea proposed during the consultations of locating social workers or support workers in each school who would then act as a coordinated inter-school team, with a specific brief to establish and improve linkages between families and schools, especially those more isolated families that 'have had previous negative experiences of education.'
- Extending the Brotherhood of St Laurence's 'Hippy Australia' model of working with parent and child beyond the initial year of primary schooling to encompass the entire period of primary school education.

The Family –School Partnership Framework provides supporting structures that would assist the development of a pilot project.

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<sup>7</sup> Family School Partnership Framework DEEWR 2008

These include details on:

1. Family-school action teams to plan, organise, implement and evaluate partnerships;
2. Development of school policies and procedures which explicitly state and clearly integrate the principles and practices of effective partnerships;
3. Establishing support networks, to enable school communities to share ideas, issues and best practice; and
4. Accountability to the community, to report on successes and drive improvement in partnerships.

Schools need strong support from community agencies to develop the processes and skills required to establish relationships with some of the families who will need to be engaged.

### **Early Intervention**

The data gathered in this project indicates there are a number of young people at risk of disengagement from school and education. These young people have been identified through this project and need to be supported more effectively by school and community agencies. An early intervention strategy / approach is required to support this cohort of young people.

The DEECD Exit policy needs to be followed by all schools in our region with the concept of identifying the young people at risk as early as possible so appropriate supports can be developed by the school and community in partnership with the young person parents and family.

### **Data Collection**

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.

Interviews (with appropriate consent) conducted with all those found to have been not attending school for any period longer than one month will provide a stronger evidence base of the period to time of disconnection as well as opportunities for intervention.

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.

Resolving the blocking of access to data by the government agencies most likely to interact with young people who are not attending school will provide 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.

## **10. Recommendations**

- 1. Develop two pilot demonstration projects with local schools to improve student engagement with a focus on:**
  - Primary to secondary transition
  - Parent engagement in young person's learning using the Family – School Partnership Framework.
  - Applied learning options for Years 7 to 9
  - Flexible learning options, e.g. part time enrolment.
  
- 2. Develop a coordinated early intervention strategy focused on effective case management approach to support students under 16 at risk of disengagement from education and training in partnership with Youth Connections and INLLEN.**
  
- 3. Improve the collection of data to inform future planning through the:**
  - Development of an agreed data collection approach with local schools and agencies in Moreland;
  - Annual collection of relevant data (in terms 2 or 3), in partnership with Youth Connections and INLLEN;
  - Promotion of Catholic and Independent schools and government agencies to participate in the annual data collection process.

## 11. References

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## Attachment 1

### Non School Agencies

#### Moreland Under 16 Project Data Collection

The “Moreland 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 Moreland. 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, the City of Moreland, the NMIT Youth Connections program, and the Salvation Army.

##### **Time frame**

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

##### **Age Range**

- We are seeking information on clients aged 10 to 15 years of age. (Those born between 30 August 1995 – 30 August 2001).

##### **Residing in Moreland**

- We are seeking information on those living in the City of Moreland (postcodes 3043, 3044, 3046, 3055, 3056, 3057, 3058, 3060).

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 Tuesday 13 September 2011.

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

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

	Date of Birth	Male or Female	Postcode	Initial of Surname	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 Tuesday 13 September 2011.

Thank You

## Attachment 2

### Schools

#### Moreland Under 16 Project Data Collection

The “Moreland 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 Moreland. 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, the City of Moreland, the NMIT Youth Connections program, and the Salvation Army.

##### Time frame

- We are seeking data on students for the current year between 1<sup>st</sup> January and 30<sup>th</sup> August 2011.

##### Age Range

- We are seeking information on students aged between 10 to 15 years of age. (Those born between 30 August 1995 – 30 August 2001).

##### Residing in Moreland

- We are seeking information on those living in the City of Moreland (postcodes 3043, 3044, 3046, 3055, 3056, 3057, 3058, 3060).

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 Tuesday 13 September 2011.

(Alternatively, the form can be printed and mailed to: The Asquith Group, PO Box 2155, Kew 3101.)

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 30 August 1995 – 30 August 2001).

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

	Date of Birth	Male or Female	Current Postcode	Initial of Surname	Language spoken at home
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-August 2011.**

	Date of Birth	Male or Female	Current Postcode	Initial of Surname	Language spoken at home
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					
16					
17					
18					
19					
20					

**Students aged between 10 to 15 years who have been expelled or asked to leave school since January 2011**

	Date of Birth	Male or Female	Current Postcode	Initial of Surname	Language spoken at home
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					

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

	Date of Birth	Male or Female	Current Postcode	Initial of Surname	Language spoken at home
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					

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 **Tuesday 13 September 2011**.

Thank You.

## Attachment 3

### Structured interview format (parents and young people)

- How young were they (or their children) when they began to not go to school?
- What caused the young people to stop going to school regularly?
- What would have kept them going to school (if anything)?
- What do they tend to do when they aren't going to school? (Stay at home? Work with family members? Look after other members of the family? Socialise?)
- Did they (or do they) attend any other programs or services when they were not going to school?
- If any have returned to school, what helps get these young people start going to school again?
- Where do they get information about what is available to help young people? (about the options and services available)
- What kind of programs would help them go back to school?
- If they have gone back to school, has anything changed? (eg. How they feel about it; or what the school offers them?)
- How do parents feel about their kids not going to school?
- What impact does not going to school have on them or their families?