Rites of Passage

Making a Difference for Geelong's Youth

Leaders for Geelong 2010 / 2012 Research Project

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Acknowledgements

The Rites of Passage team would like to thank the following organisations and individuals for their assistance with our Leaders for Geelong research project.

Without their input, guidance and generosity, this project would not have been possible.

David Burke – City of Greater Geelong

Grant Rau – Education Department

Leaders for Geelong participants (past and present);

Leigh Bartlett - Batforce

Steve Brown - Geelong High School

Charlie Scudamore - Geelong Grammar School

Wyndham City Council

Committee for Geelong: Leaders for Geelong Sub-Committee

Deakin University – Sarah Macleod

Jean Paul – Program Director, Leaders for Geelong Program

Molly White – COGG Youth Support Consultative Committee

Alex Suwitra - COGG Youth Support Consultative Committee

Kelly Read - COGG Youth Support Consultative Committee

Jonathon Roberts – Managing Director, DDG

David Jefferson – Time for Youth

Team Members

The Rites of Passage project team comprised four participants from the 2010 – 2012 Leaders for Geelong intake and research student, Sarah Macleod of Deakin University.

From left:

Barry Knight
Environment and Hygiene Manager, **Alcoa of Australia**

John Fitzgerald
Business Banking Manager, **Bendigo Bank**

Dan Clancy
HSE Field Team Leader, **Shell Refinery**

Damien Christensen
Acting Inspector, **Victoria Police**

Executive summary

The Leaders for Geelong (LfG) program vision is "to provide the Geelong region with an alumnus of inspired and well connected visionaries who will be in a position of knowledge to lead us into the future".

Early in the events program for the 2010/12 Leaders for Geelong program, the group undertook the Welfare & Poverty and Law & Order sessions. These two sessions combined to create much discussion amongst the 2010/12 participants on what was termed the "Rites of Passage" for youth.

It was the perception that Australia tolerated a culture whereby ones Rite of Passage into adulthood was marked by anti social behaviours which may include excessive drinking, drug taking, violence or bullying. This was sometimes associated with lack of respect for authority, parents or those of a different sex, race or religion.

In the view of the Rites of Passage (RoP) research team, the future of Geelong would be enhanced by improving the capability of the region to support youth through the teen years, into adulthood. This support may come in the form of easily accessible information to youth to make well informed decisions. This is also supported by a Geelong community with the skills to effectively coach and mentor youth in making well informed decisions, effectively building healthy relationships. Well informed decision making could form the basis of reduced anti-social behaviour and other youth issues in the region.

The RoP research team convened to explore the potential to better support youth through the transition to adulthood with a specific aim to:

- Determine an effective means of providing credible information to youth and parents to allow informed decision making, and
- Determine how coaching and mentoring skills could be a catalyst to improved decision making

Responding to these aims, the group undertook research of past and present LfG participants, a selection of educational and youth support organisations in the region, youth support consultative committee team members and City of Greater Geelong representatives. This also extended to Wyndham City Council's youth support program.

The research did determine a desire and need existed for improved communication and an opportunity to increase the coaching and mentoring skills in the Geelong region.

Specific findings included

- Leaders for Geelong participants are an untapped resource willing to undertake development training in effective mentoring;
- Youth respond to effective electronic communications;
- Based on an identified effective program, an internet-based information package is regularly accessed;
- The Geelong region lacks readily accessible electronic information of a credible nature.

The research findings and continued discussions with key stakeholders provided the RoP research team with a model that will improve the communication flow and support to the Geelong regions youth. A sustainable model for implementation was also recommended.

Recommendations

Following completion of all research and trials, the RoP team provide the following recommendations:

- Leaders for Geelong participants undertake training in effective mentoring;
- A website and/or smart phone application be constructed to provide credible information to Geelong youth in a suitable form;
- The construction and maintenance of the website be managed through the City of Greater Geelong's Community Youth Services Department
- Member(s) of the RoP research team sit on the Youth Support Consultative Committee which will provide advice on content and design of the website.
- Further discussion be held with the Education Department to promote the website to the target audience.

In conclusion, the RoP research team recommendations are not the immediate answer to all of the Geelong regions youth related issues as this is a highly complex challenge. However the recommendations provide some immediate benefits and a qualified handover strategy, with the potential for these to be worked upon by future LfG research teams. The research fits well with the vision of the Committee for Geelong of leading Geelong towards a better future.

Introduction

Early in the events program for the 2010/12 Leaders for Geelong program, the group undertook the Welfare & Poverty and Law & Order sessions. These two sessions combined to create much discussion amongst the 2010/12 participants on what was termed the "Rites of Passage" for youth.

It was the perception that Australia tolerated a culture whereby ones Rite of Passage into adulthood was marked by anti-social behaviours which may include excessive drinking, drug taking, violence or bullying. This was sometimes associated with lack of respect for authority, parents or those of a different sex, race or religion.

Statistics obtained from Victoria Police[1] show that Youth (aged 10-17) are over-represented across all high volume crime categories in the Geelong area. Crime rates for this age group are well above state averages. This is recognised by Victoria Police and the Geelong Division with initiatives planned for proactive and reactionary approaches.

The 2010/12 group agreed that this was not the Rite of Passage that should prevail during these years, rather one that provides respect, healthy relationships with peers, parents and authority figures as well a sense of community respect and care for other members of our community. It was agreed that changing this Rite of Passage was a highly complex challenge, but yet a challenge that a courageous group like the Leaders for Geelong (and Committee for Geelong) should acknowledge and lead.

Thus, the motivation and idea for the Rites of Passage research team was generated. Based on the hypothesis that well informed and supported youth are more likely to make better decisions, the research team's aim was to understand and seek to improve communication flow to youth, and to improve the capacity in the Geelong region to mentor youth.

Project Outline

Objective
Educate youth in the themes of rites of passage with emphasis on creating behaviours and relationships that keep them well informed, supported and enable them to enter adulthood in a socially aware manner.

Target Audience
At the commencement of our research project the thought was that 15-16 year olds were the target audience. Discussions with stakeholders indicated that the target age is much lower (8-10 year olds) as this is the age range where key behaviours around rites of passage issues and respect for relationships is formed. This should be reinforced during the transition up to Year 7.

Pillars of the Project Scope & Possible Solutions

Rites of Passage (RoP) Theme Education & Availability of Material
There appears to be a wealth of knowledge available on themes for youth, although the material is not consolidated. Batforce has a registry of services in the Geelong region while Wyndham City Council has an extensive website. The challenge seems to be the effective connection of the target group with the key information, including ensuring that the 'at risk' components (i.e. parents of problem children) of the target group are engaged on this material.

The development of a youth friendly website and smart phone application appears the most suitable mechanism for delivering this material. Based on the model at the Wyndham City Council, this would be coordinated by the City of Greater Geelong Youth Services Department. Delivery of this material to the target age groups can be facilitated by the Education Department.

Presentation & Mentoring on Healthy Relationships
From project inception we have seen value in and a need for, a mentoring component on rites of passage issues.   We have identified an opportunity for mentoring training to be delivered to future participants in the Leaders for Geelong program.

Methodology

In setting the project's goals and objectives, the Rites of Passage (RoP) team needed to establish:

- What experience and understanding Leaders for Geelong (LfG) participants already had on mentoring, and their view on undertaking mentoring training during their LfG program;

- Did current community organisations practising in the youth field feel there was a need for specific training and would this make LfG graduates attractive candidates for mentoring on rites of passage issues;

- What is the preferred method for youth to access information? Is this done in the Geelong region? Is there examples of it being done well elsewhere?

- How do you communicate the availability of material to the target group?

Methodology

During 2011/12, the RoP research team conducted broad research including:

- Surveying past and present LfG participants;
- face-to-face meetings with Geelong based youth based organisations;
- face-to-face meetings with Youth Support Consultative Committee members
- face-to-face meetings with local council youth based departments;
- face-to-face meetings with neighbouring local council youth based departments; and
- face-to-face meetings with representatives from educational sector.

As the research was undertaken, the proposed outcomes/solutions were altered to reflect the information particularly that gained from discussions with the key stakeholders working in the youth area.

Research Findings

Leaders for Geelong Participants Survey

Snapshot

From the LfG participants that responded to the survey:

- 96% believe adding mentoring component to the program would add value;
- 87% would be prepared to participate in mentoring training (10% unsure);
- 80% feel they would utilise any mentoring skills learnt;
- 47% feel that mentoring is important enough to be added as a standalone program.

Background

The Leaders for Geelong participants (past and present) were surveyed to understand the view on mentoring capacity. Mentoring in this context was described as "little m" mentoring, meaning that any training provided to LfG participants was not necessarily designed to mentor troubled or "at risk" youth, rather general mentoring of youth, family members, friends, associates or work colleagues.

31 participants responded, 19 from the 2010/12 LfG group and 12 from the alumni.

The value of mentoring

96% of respondents believed that adding mentoring to the LfG program would add value to both the LfG program and the Geelong community.

Do you feel that providing future Leaders for Geelong participants training in effective mentoring would add value to the program and to the Geelong community?
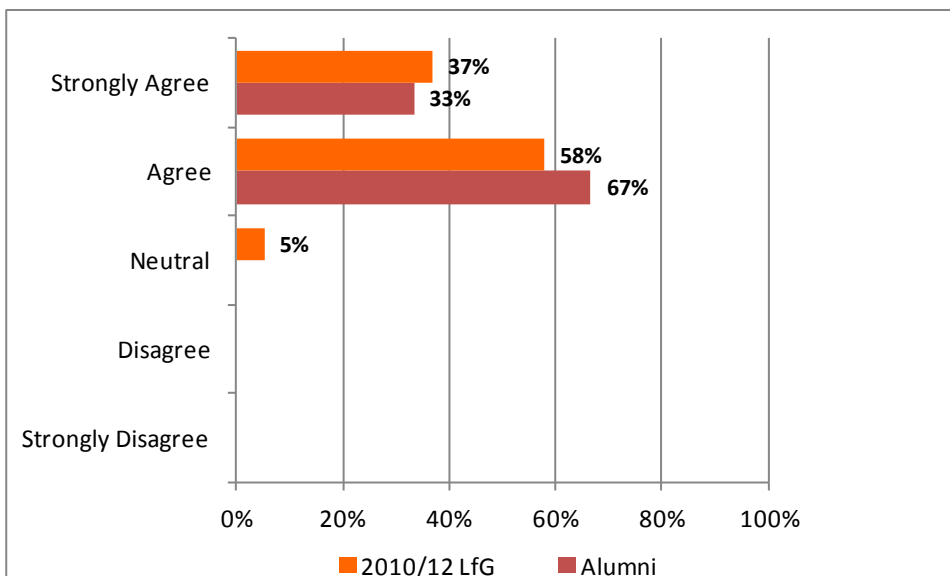
Participation in Mentoring Training.

90% of respondents confirmed that they would be prepared to undertake mentoring training as part of the LfG program.

Would you be prepared to undertake training in Effective Mentoring as part of the LfG program?
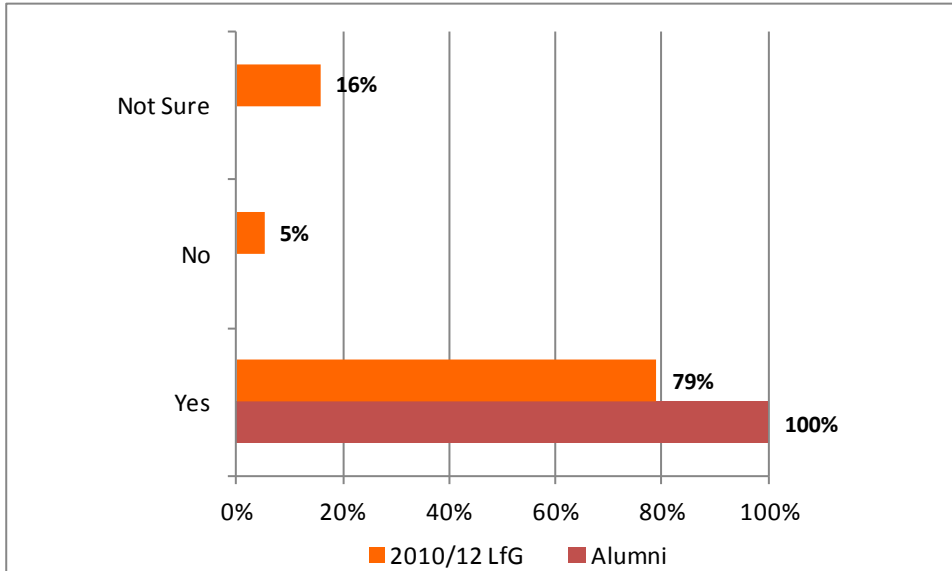
Use of Mentoring Skills

80% of respondents believed that if they undertook training in effective mentoring, then they would use these skills in social, workplace or youth based settings.

How likely would you be to use the learned mentoring skills in your workplace, social settings, or as a structured program supporting youth?
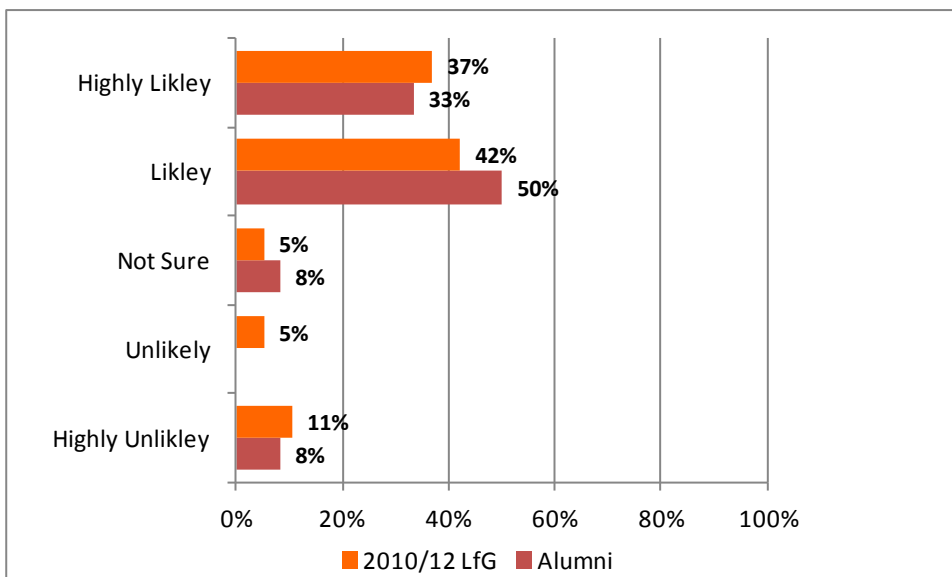
Mentoring in the LfG Program

46% of respondents believed that training in effective mentoring should be a standalone session in the LfG program. Other alternatives include replacing the Philanthropy program (15%) or the Ethics program (12%).

*To fit Effective Mentoring Training into the LfG program is a challenge. If you had to choose one program that could be replaced (or the speakers incorporated into other sessions), which would it be?*
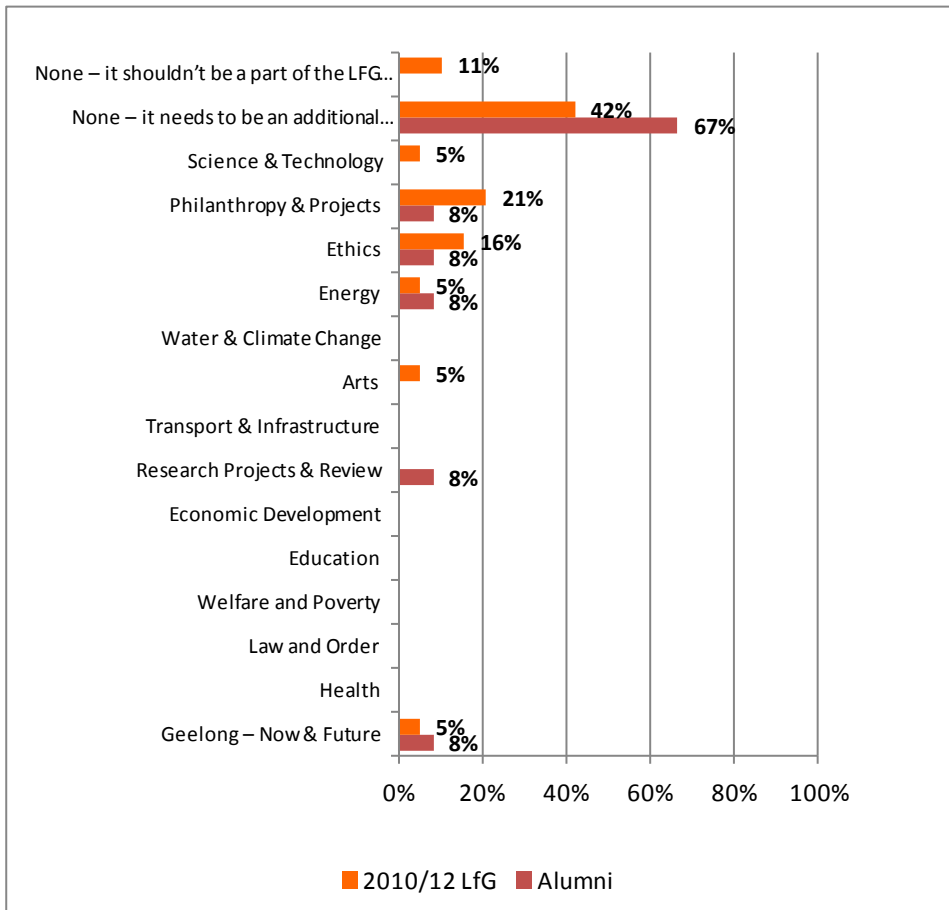
The Value of Mentoring

92% of the alumni respondents believed that adding effective mentoring training would have enhanced their LfG experience.

Do you feel this would have enhanced your LfG experience? (Alumni Only)

Victoria Police Discussions
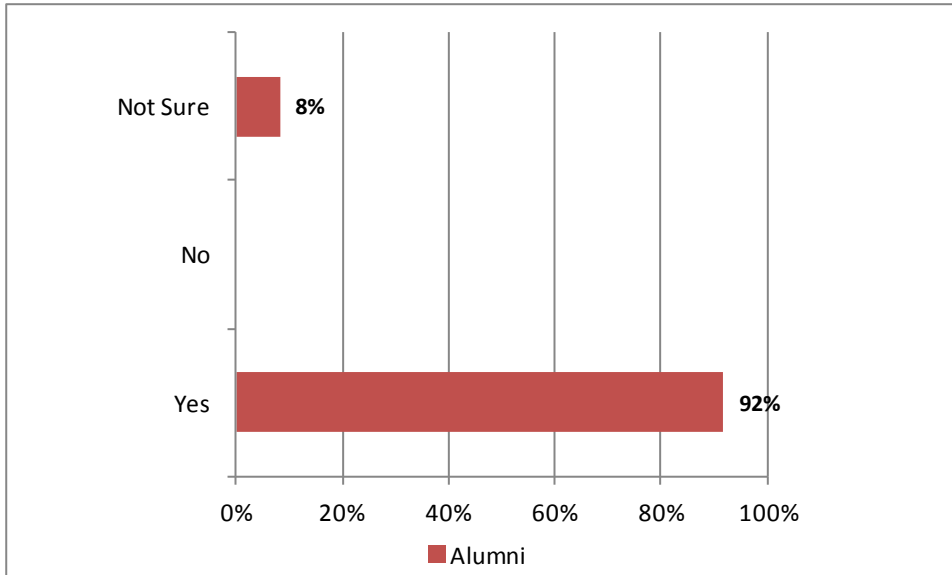
Snapshot

Discussions with Victoria Police identified:

- The Geelong region is over-represented and above state averages in all area of major crime in 10 – 17 age group;

- Social media and other online information is the main source of information for those under 18 years.

- Victoria Police have identified through the '*2.0 Action Plan*' that the opportunity to maximise online tools and applications to influence community safety and engagement is immense.

Discussion

During the 2010/2012 Leaders for Geelong Law and Order program visit it was evident the challenges that exist in connecting with the youth of the Geelong region on rites of passage issues. This was particularly evident with our visit to the Geelong Victoria Police Branch where the importance of early intervention on youth issues was highlighted.

It was encouraging to learn that the use of social media in connecting with youth is well recognized. The Victoria Government has released a '*2.0 Action Plan*' articulating a whole of Victorian Public Service (VPS) approach to social media use. The plan proposes that social media applications are more than just communication tools, and should be used to develop and disseminate policy. '*Guidance for use of social media in the Victorian Public Sector*' published by the Public Sector Standard Commissioner, calls for organisations to develop and enforce social media policies and protocols.

In the past decade, reliance on traditional media forms such as television, newspaper and radio fell 2.4 per cent, 11.5 per cent and 13.6 percent respectively. The shift toward social media is indicative of a broader cultural change in the way media and open source information is used. People under 18 years of age predominantly source information from online or social media sources. This highlights, at least for this cohort, implications for Victoria Police communication strategies.

American policing services found online services that promote community interaction not only reduce costs for service delivery, but also achieve community benefits such as increased interaction, timeliness and convenience of policing services. The opportunity for Victoria Police to maximise tools and applications to influence community safety and engagement is immense. Effective processes and tools that promote community engagement are likely to shape crime reporting methods and information collection opportunities.

Snapshot

Discussions with youth service practitioners revealed:

- A strategy to reduce anti-social behaviour at the Rite of Passage age, is to confirm the value and importance of Healthy Relationships at a very early age;

- Age 8-10 is the target age to introduce information on Rites of Passage themes, and should be reinforced at the transition to Year 7

Background

The RoP research team had several face to face discussions with
- Leigh Bartlett (Regional Youth Affairs Consultant, BatForce)
- David Jefferson (Coordinator, Time for Youth)

Discussion

Initially, the RoP research team began with the premise that the target age for the dissemination of Rites of Passage information should be in the 15 – 18 age group. Initial discussion with Leigh indicated that behaviours are largely established by this age.

In Leigh's view, one aspect in the reduction in anti social behaviours is to ingrain the concept of Healthy Relationships at an early age (starting age 8). Healthy Relationships with parents, teachers, peers, authority figures is the base from which informed and respectful decisions are made. As there is typically a distinct transition at the Year 7 school age, this is also a point where reinforcing the Healthy Relationship aspects can be implemented.

When discussing the concept of disseminating credible, relevant and accessible information to youth, Leigh introduced the BatForce WAYTOGO[2] manual. This manual is a listing of youth services and other information for youth referrals. It was agreed that the manual requires an update, and the view of the RoP research team was that the manual contained relevant information, but is not currently in a form that would be attractive for access by the target-age youth and potentially parents. Time for Youth's David Jefferson was extremely supportive of a consolidated approach for youth to access information and potential referral to agencies.

BatForce currently provide information sessions to parents of students on youth-related topics. This services aims to educate parents, and to communicate the services provided by BatForce as widely as possible. An observation from Leigh, was that the type of communication is not sufficient to reach all of the target audience, and does not extend to all parents and youth that may require assistance.

The provision of skilled mentors and youth-friendly information are seen as important in closing this gap.

Local Government Stakeholder Discussions

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Snapshot

Discussions with local government stakeholders revealed:

- The concept of an informative, relevant, electronic means of communicating Rites of Passage issues is consistent with local government strategy;
- This concept has been implemented successfully at a nearby local government;
- A youth consultative committee is available to assist in the development of internet-based material;
- It is envisaged RoP research group members will sit on this consultative committee to oversee the implementation of the information
- City of Greater Geelong's Youth Department have offered in principle assistance to take ownership of the web-based information post deployment.

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Background

The RoP research team had several face to face discussions with

- David Burke (Youth Services Manager, City of Greater Geelong)
- Patricia Taylor (Youth Services Website and Administration, Wyndham City Council)

Wyndham City Council

Through discussion and research the RoP project group identified that Wyndham City Council had, through necessity, established an effective electronic medium "Wyndham Youth[3]" to reach young people who reside or use services from within the council boundary.

The evolution of this internet site at Wyndham was due to the catchment area experiencing rapid population growth and experiencing numerous issues around young people. The content was based on research from Year 10 students at a local high school. The feedback from the students was that youth shied away from "corporate or government" looking sites, and preferred current "in-style" sites that included content such as games, activities, music and events.

Wyndham City Council supported and funded the creation of an internet site for use by an increasing youth support service network.

A staff member has ownership of updating the site with content, spending around 6 hours per week keeping the information contemporary.

The internet site is currently experiencing in excess of 500,000 hits per month.

This site is designed to help parents and young people become informed of current events and it provides information and referrals for people of all ages.

The utilisation of the internet site has exceeded expectation of the Wyndham City Council. It has greater capture than pamphlets, directories and phone enquiries. People who use the service can be provided with information on what is available within the area and has links to State and National services such as *Beyond Blue* or *Life Line*.

The use of a central point such as an internet site to capture young people and welfare issues can also provide statistical data back to community leaders regarding current issues experienced by young people within local areas.

With many young people entering the City of Greater Geelong from the Surf Coast and Golden Plains Shires and the Borough of Queenscliff on a daily basis for school and work, it is envisaged services in Geelong which are currently available to, but not used by this group would be captured.

City of Greater Geelong

Following extensive consultation with BatForce and Wyndham City Council, the RoP research team proposed that City of Greater Geelong be the logical entity to take responsibility for the ongoing maintenance of the product and possibly the initial development of the product.

COGG have a specialised "Community Youth Department" headed by David Burke.

David provided a background report *Reaching out to Rural Young People – Service Access Research Project*[4]*,* which confirmed the strategy of the RoP research team in that it recommended;

- Use of electronic media is essential to share information with young people;

- A website or app may include a section with agency information and contact numbers where you can book appointments with services, details of up-coming youth events, chat-rooms to discuss issues anonymously with professionals, bus timetables, participation opportunities and anything else necessary.

David has provided written confirmation that COGG will own and operate the product post introduction (i.e. signing off on our team's exit strategy) and importantly offered his resources to assist with the product development and build. The youths involved with his department will have crucial input into product design / content / distribution.

David will also facilitate our team's ongoing involvement in a region wide consultative group (including COGG, Education Department, Police, DHS, Youth Support Agencies) who meet regularly to ensure services to at-risk youth are being offered on a co-ordinated basis. We would envisage member(s) of our team sitting on this consultative committee until the product is built and distributed.

Youth Consultative Committee Discussion

Discussions with members of the Youth Consultative Committee revealed:

- The development of youth friendly electronic medium is an effective way of engaging Geelong Youth.
- A willingness for the Consultative Committee to engage in the content and format development, and review of the electronic medium

Background

The RoP research team had several face to face meetings with members of the City of Greater Geelong Youth Consultative Committee made up of members Kelly Read, Molly White and Alex Suwitra.

Discussion

Through City of Greater Geelong Youth Services Manager David Burke, the RoP Research Team had the opportunity on several occasions to engage the views of the Youth Services Consultative Committee (YSCC).

Importantly, the YSCC members were able to provide different perspectives than those of the research team. The YSCC members were willing to involve themselves in the development of the website or app.

This involvement took the form of

- Reviewing other youth services websites for content, look and usability,
- Development of website content,
- Review of website design and app usability,
- Providing perspective from the target audience.

Educational Sector Stakeholder Discussions

Snapshot

Discussions with educational sector stakeholders revealed:

- Schools are conscious and active in the area of "Rites of Passage" issues, but they are often tailored to the recent experience(s) of the school;

- Education on "Rites of Passage" issues can sometimes be reactionary;

- The Department of Education is supportive of informed electronic information being made available, and can assist in raising its awareness.

Background

The RoP research team had several face to face discussions with

- Claire Brown (Deputy Principal, St Josephs College)
- Charlie Scudamore (Vice Principal/Head of Corio, Geelong Grammar School)
- Steven Brown (Year 12 Coordinator, Geelong High School)
- Grant Rau (Regional Director, Department of Education)
- Merzhad Pakzamir (Program Manager ITS, Deakin University)

Discussion

The RoP research team identified schools as the natural starting point to:

- access students & parents as the major users of our finished product and for input on what the product should look like to maximise use / access / effectiveness.
- teaching staff could be a major user of the product
- schools themselves would be the major distribution vehicle to inform parents and students about the product.

The RoP team met with individual school representatives who broadly supported the concept and offered assistance in terms of access to teachers and student and parents for feedback. I discussions with the Regional Director of the Department of Education, Grant Rau, he has offered his full support on distribution of the product to parents & students and promoting the use of the product across all schools in the region. The proposed deployment is targeted to occur in late 2012 for the regional government Year 6 students about to progress to Year 7.

Deakin University has the capability to develop website and smart phone applications.

Final Recommendations

The Rites of Passage research team identified that the youth related issues in the Geelong region represent a highly complex challenges and there is no quick fix solution. However the recommendations provide some immediate benefits, with the potential for these to be worked upon by future Leaders for Geelong research teams. A qualified handover strategy is provided. The research fits well with the vision of the Committee for Geelong of leading Geelong towards a better future.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to improve the transition through the Rites of Passage years with emphasis on creating behaviours and relationships that keep youth well informed, supported and enable the transition to adulthood in a socially aware manner:

- Incorporate mentoring training into the Leaders for Geelong program;

- Develop a website and smart phone app (based on the Wyndham City Council model) that contains relevant, youth friendly information;

- Rites of Passage team member(s) to sit on the Geelong City Council Youth Services Consultative Committee to oversee the electronic information development;

- Ownership and maintenance of the electronic material be the responsibility of COGG's Youth Services Department;

- Promote the availability of the information through the Department of Education.

Exit Strategy

A clear part of the charter of the Rites of Passage research project was to define an exit strategy that allowed for the sustainable ongoing development, implementation and ownership of youth services information.

Exit Strategy

The exit strategy can be described as follows:

- Identification of a suitable training provider for effective mentoring to be recommended as a future Leaders for Geelong research project;

- Ownership of the development of a website and smart phone application to be the accountability of City of Greater Geelong's Youth Services Department;

- Communication of the material to be the responsibility of the Department of Education;

- RoP team member(s) to sit on Youth Services Consultative Committee until deployment is achieved.

References

1. Confidential data "WD1 Youth Crime Data" provided by M. Williamson and D. Christensen (Victoria Police)

2. WAYTOGO Manual.
   BatForce (Barwon Adolescent Task Force)
   http://www.batforce.org.au/sector-information/waytogo-referral-guide

3. Wyndham Youth website
   Wyndham City Council
   http://youth.wyndham.vic.gov.au/home

4. Reaching out to Rural Young People – Service Access Research Project
   Monica Butler, Youth Development Officer. Geelong City Council