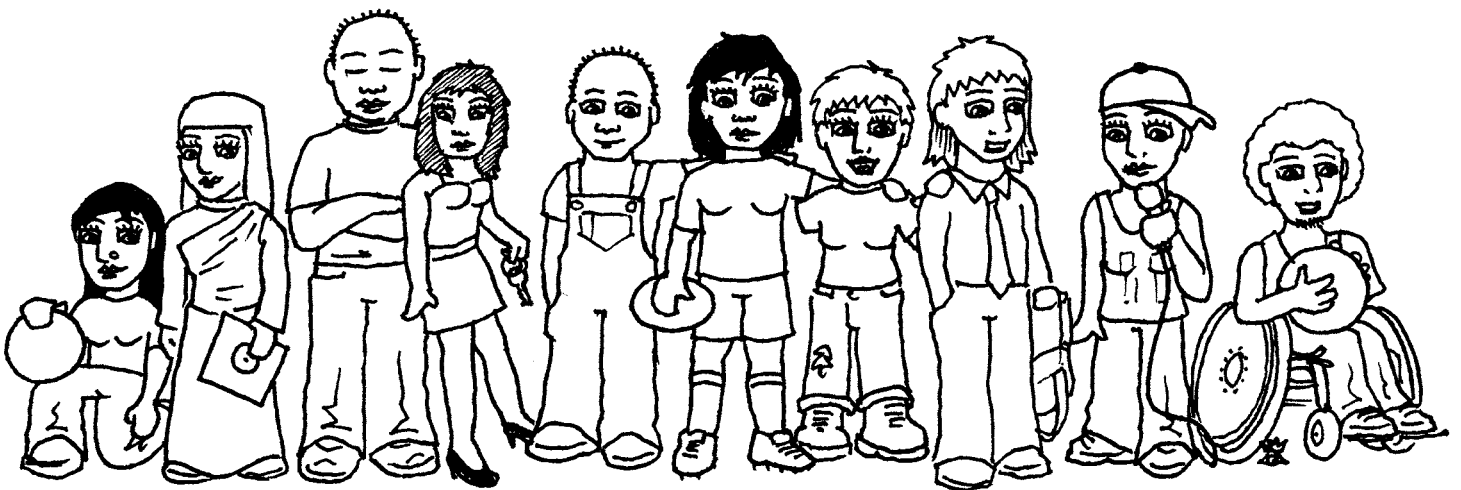


Opening the doors

*A 'Do It Yourself' Access and Equity manual
for working with young people*



*Produced by YAPA and the Access Project Reference Group
for the Nepean Better Futures Strategy*

Opening the Doors

This is one chapter of **Opening the Doors**. The other chapters are:

- What is Access and Equity?
- What does the law require me to do about Access & Equity?
- What does my funding body require me to do about Access & Equity?
- Young people with a disability
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people
- Gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender young people
- Early school leavers
- Rural and geographically isolated young people
- Young women
- Young parents
- Refugee and migrant young people
- Young people with mental health issues
- Young people involved with the juvenile justice system

Opening the Doors is only available online. You can:

- browse the publication in a series of web pages
- download individual chapters as PDF files
- download the whole publication as a PDF (large file: 2.4 MB – broadband recommended).

www.yapa.org.au/openingdoors

Enquiries: info@yapa.org.au (02) 9319 1100 or 1800 627 323

Produced by YAPA & the Nepean Access Project Reference Group for the Nepean Better Futures Strategy.

Drawings: Colin Stokes.

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Disclaimer: This manual is a general guide for NSW services designed specifically for the Nepean Region (Blue Mountains Penrith & Hawkesbury). The producers of the manual took reasonable care to ensure that all information was correct as of 2005. However government regulations, laws and standards are complex and do change over time. This document is not intended as legal advice. You should seek clarification on legal matters through other publications and authorities.

How to use the checklists

We have developed some checklists to get you thinking about how your service is performing on access and equity issues.

It is best if you can work through these activities with your management committee or staff team, but you can also do these activities by yourself.

Steps

1. Read through each checklist and answer yes or no to each question
2. You now have some guidelines for what you are doing well (your yes responses) and some goals for how you can improve (your no responses)
3. Prioritise each of your no responses
4. Choose 3 – 5 goals to work on in the next month and write a plan of how and when you will achieve them. You may want to include your plans in your work plan or strategic plan.
5. Once you have achieved one of your goals you can record your action as a new achievement and choose another goal from the remaining items on your list.
6. Keep other people, including your management committee, informed of your progress and share good ideas and examples with your colleagues and your youth network.

WORKING WITH ... **EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS**



DEFINITION

An early school leaver is a young person who has left school before completing Year 12. ^{1,2, 4,13}

DEMOGRAPHICS

According to the NSW Department of Education and Training, about 8% of 15 year olds in NSW leave school each year. The percentage of Year 7 students who continue to the end to the end of Year 12 in NSW government schools is approximately 65%. In NSW, the school retention rate is lower for students from low socio-economic backgrounds (56.3%) and remote areas (48%) and much lower for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (29.2%). ¹³

Truancy rates in NSW are not publicly available but research estimates that around 10% of students are absent on any school day (includes parent-approved and non-approved absences) and that truancy is increasing.

TERMINOLOGY

Early school leaver is an acceptable term.

Don't use the term *dropout* because many early school leavers have not dropped out of school. Instead they have made a conscious decision to pursue other employment and training goals such as apprenticeships.

OVERVIEW OF NEEDS AND ISSUES

Changing nature of school to work transitions

Twenty years ago the transition from school to work was a relatively straightforward one. The majority of students left school before completing Year 12 to take on full time employment.

The school to work transition has changed dramatically in the past two decades. The majority of students now stay to complete Year 12 with over 40% combining full time school study with part time work. The number

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of students combining school with work has doubled in the last decade alone. ^{25, 26}

There has been a steady reduction in full time job opportunities for young people. Jobs that are available are generally casual or part time. Satisfactory completion of Year 12 is increasingly a requirement for many jobs and even apprenticeships.

Early school leavers therefore face increasing disadvantage as the completion of Year 12 becomes not only the norm, but essential to securing employment and further education and training opportunities.

Not being in school long enough (early leaving) or often enough (truancy) has a dramatic impact on young people's life opportunities.

National and international research provides strong evidence that maintaining a connection to education protects young people from extreme risk behaviours.

Young people who miss out on school also miss out on gaining basic skills and knowledge and are at greater risk of socio-economic disadvantage, unemployment, poverty, homelessness and involvement in crime. The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research has found that poor school performance is a strong predictor of involvement in crime. ^{6, 25}

Early school leavers:

- have a much higher unemployment rate ^{2, 18, 20, 24}
- tend to be employed for less time in a given year ^{18, 20}
- are more likely to obtain jobs in a narrow field of occupations ¹⁸
- are more likely to be reliant on government income support ¹⁸

- are more likely to have lower paid jobs. ²⁰

As can be seen from the table below, the unemployment rate of early school leavers is nearly double that of those who have completed Year 12.

Educational attainment and labour force status of people aged 15-24 years		
	Completed Year 12	Early school leaver
Employment rate	89.6%	80.9%
Full time	46.0%	62.5%
Part time	43.7%	18.3%
Unemployment rate	10.4%	19.1%
Total	100%	100%

Australian Bureau of Statistics ²

Those who have completed Year 12 have a lower full time employment rate than early school leavers because many are combining part time work with full or part time study. Students who complete Year 12 are significantly more likely to undertake further study than those who have left school early.

Educational institution attendance of people aged 15-24 years		
	Completed Year 12	Early school leaver
Higher education	33.2%	1.5%
TAFE	11.2%	15.8%
Other Tertiary	3.0%	2.2%
Total	47.4%	19.5%

Australian Bureau of Statistics ²



Why do some young people leave school early?

There are many reasons why some young people don't stay at school. Some early school leavers say that that school is too boring, too hard, not practical or relevant. Some say that they don't feel valued by their teachers while others simply want to leave so they can look for work.¹³

Main reason for leaving school before completing Year 12	
Work related reason	46.0%
Little difference to job prospects	3.5%
Got (or wanted) a job or apprenticeship	42.5%
Schooling related reason	23.3%
Did not do well or failed subjects	6.1%
Did not like school or teachers	15.4%
Personal or family reason	18.0%
Lost interest or motivation	13.5%
Own ill health, injury or disability	3.4%
Other reason	12.7%
Total	100%

Australian Bureau of Statistics ²

According to the NSW Department of Education and Training:

“Students are more likely to stay on at school if they are satisfied with school in general, if they perform well at school, if their relationships with teachers are good and if they find school programs relevant to their current and future goals and interests.” ²⁵

Feeling connected, feeling a sense of belonging and having strong relationships with peers

and teachers are strong protective factors against early school leaving, particularly if the student is a low academic achiever or from a low socio-economic background. ^{4,29}

A low sense of achievement is the strongest predictor of early school leaving. ²⁰

Schools which provide extra-curricular activities such as sport, community programs, music, art, drama, leadership opportunities, and encourage students to participate in decision making, report higher levels of student engagement. ¹⁶

Which young people are at risk of leaving school early?

Students who have a higher risk of leaving school early include those who:

- have low literacy and numeracy levels ^{20, 22, 24}
- have a low sense of achievement with school ¹⁹
- are from low socio-economic backgrounds ^{18, 20, 22}
- have less educated families
- are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders ^{20, 22, 25}
- live in a regional or remote area ^{2, 18, 20, 22}
- have parents with a limited amount of formal schooling and lower income ¹⁸
- are male. ^{2, 18, 20}

More information on young mothers, Aboriginal young people, young people in rural areas, young men and women, and refugee young people is outlined below.



Young mothers

Young pregnant women and young mothers often drop out of school due to reasons such as the perceived irrelevance of the curriculum, feeling out of place, not knowing about the support and flexibility that the school can offer, difficulty in securing child care and lack of support at home. ²⁵

More information about the needs of young mothers is contained in the young parents section of this manual.

Aboriginal young people

Aboriginal young people are the most disadvantaged group in the education system, facing a higher rate of absenteeism and early school leaving.

Aboriginal students have, on average, a higher rate of absenteeism from school. Regular attendance is absolutely vital because it enables students to learn at the same rate as their peers and develop the skills and knowledge required for each level of the education system.

The attendance rate at secondary schools is 70-86% for Aboriginal students and 86-92% for non-Aboriginal students.

Aboriginal students are also over-represented in suspension and exclusion statistics. ⁴

Aboriginal students' education suffers from the higher rate of absenteeism, resulting in substantially lower levels of literacy and numeracy than non-Aboriginal students.

Many Aboriginal young people come from families which have experienced long periods of unemployment and lower rates of academic achievement. Many Aboriginal students also face barriers to the successful completion of school such as nowhere to study at home or lack of privacy for homework.

Initiatives that seek to increase students' engagement with school, such as extra-curricular activities, have proved successful in increasing attendance, and as a result the academic performance of students.

By the age of 15, a quarter of all Aboriginal students have left school, compared to about 6% of their non-Aboriginal peers. ²⁶

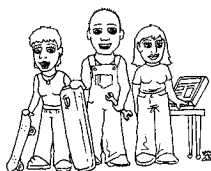
Young people in rural areas

Young people in rural areas are much more likely to leave school early, as detailed in the table below.

Early school leavers aged 15-24 years	
Capital city	27.0%
Rest of state	44.8%

Australian Bureau of Statistics ²

Rural young people face a number of barriers to successfully completing Year 12 including travelling long distances to access school, restricted subject choice due to lower student numbers and having to move away from home to access further employment and training options.



Gender issues

Young men are far more likely to leave school early, as detailed below.

Early school leavers aged 15-24 years	
Male	38.5%
Female	27.3%

Australian Bureau of Statistics ²

However early school leavers who are male tend to fare better than their female counterparts.

Of all early school leavers, young women are less likely to:

- participate in further education and training (29% females compared to 44% males) ¹⁸
- gain an apprenticeship (8% females compared to 33% males) ¹⁸
- be employed for most of their first year out of school and remain employed for the first four years (32% females compared to 50% males). ¹⁸

Early school leavers' employment opportunities tend to be concentrated in traditional male and female job roles. 90% of employed early school leaver males work in labouring, trades and sales, while two thirds of employed early school leaver females work in clerical, sales and services. ¹⁸

Refugee young people

Refugee young people are also at risk of leaving school early.

Young refugees often require extra assistance with schooling and homework because their previous education may have been disrupted or even non-existent.

Many of these young people have missed out on education because they spent a significant part of their childhood in refugee camps.

Some young people may not be able to read or write in their own language.

Once they arrive in Australia, young refugees are placed in an Intensive English Centre for 3-4 school terms. IECs provide English and school education as well as additional support such as counselling for students. After completing time at IEC, students are then placed in a mainstream high school.

School in Australia can be very challenging for refugee young people because it is in a different language, in a different system and offers a different way of learning.

At mainstream high schools, young refugees are placed in a grade reflecting their age, rather than their level of schooling. It can be very difficult for young people to catch up on many years of schooling with limited support and as a result they may drop out of the school system altogether.

Refugee families are often not able to help their children with their homework because of language and education differences. Many parents and grandparents have no educational experience at all.

Many young refugees find it difficult to study at home, particularly if they have a large number of siblings at home.

The pressure to leave school and take up work, or to work part time, is very high. Young people often feel responsible for helping to pay family debt and may also send money to support family and friends, and to assist further family members to migrate.

More information about refugee young people is contained in the *Refugee and Migrant* section of this manual.



PRACTICAL TIPS

What can you do to assist early school leavers?

1. Work with schools

One of the best ways to assist early school leavers is to help prevent young people from leaving school early.

Schools are under increased pressure to deal with a range of “welfare” issues affecting young people with very limited resources to manage these issues. For example many schools do not have a full time student counsellor and many schools engage in practices such as suspension without having programs in place to deal with the issues as to why young people are misbehaving or not coping at school.³¹

It’s difficult for young people to concentrate on education when they have other issues in their life that aren’t being addressed.⁷

Youth services are in an ideal position to provide support to at risk young people. The NSW Youth Services Census found that most services have some contact with their local school and over three quarters wanted to increase the work they did with schools.^{21, 32}

There is great potential for school and youth service partnerships. Many youth services have the staffing, resources and time available to provide case management and support for young people at risk of leaving school early.²⁵

Your service may be able to offer programs such as:

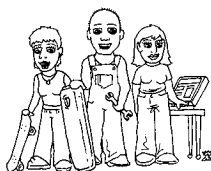
- stress management and relaxation workshops
- family support and liaison services

- anger management programs
- peer mediation
- case management
- breakfast programs
- practical assistance with sporting programs
- homework help
- confidential counselling services, to complement the work of the school counsellor
- referral to appropriate community agencies
- intensive support for students who truant, are suspended, excluded or expelled
- support for particular groups of young people such as young refugees or Aboriginal young people.

The best way to find out what your local school needs is to ask. Most schools have a range of existing programs and the support you can offer may be support for an existing program, rather than the development of a new program.⁷

Develop a written proposal outlining the program and support options you can provide and meet with the school representative to negotiate the type of program you can offer. The Deputy Principal or the School Counsellor are the best contact points at your local school.

Outline the educational and social benefits of your program and support options and how your service will be reliable and consistent in delivering them. It can be helpful to bring along your service brochure and annual report to the meeting.



You will need to demonstrate that you understand and agree to the school's policies, guidelines, and referral procedures. The development of a protocol which outlines roles, responsibilities, agreements and communication channels can be a strong foundation for a school and community service partnership. Research has shown that once such protocols have been developed they work very well.²⁸

YAPA has developed a fact sheet on working with schools which contains further advice – www.yapa.org.au/youthwork .

Best practice programs for early school leavers:

- listen to the views of young people and provide opportunities for them to have their say about program design, management and evaluation
- use a strengths-based approach, acknowledging and building on young people's existing strengths and celebrating achievements
- establish positive and respectful relationships between young people and supportive adults
- build teamwork and cooperation between students
- set fair rules and expectations which are consistently applied
- encourage young people to take responsibility for their learning and behaviour
- focus on skills that are practical and prepare young people for life and work and/or further education^{4, 10}

2. Work with schools on truancy issues

Your service should have a clear policy about opening hours and services for students who truant. See the YAPA model policy on drop-in available at www.yapa.org.au/youthwork .

Work with your local school to provide support for young people who truant, and ensure your programs address the reasons for truancy behaviour.

3. Offer a quiet space for homework

Many libraries and youth services offer homework help or a quiet space for homework. A directory of these services is available at www.eccnsw.org.au.

The most effective of these services use qualified staff and volunteers who have experience in teaching and are familiar with the school curriculum.

If there is no homework help centre in your local area talk to your local school and centres in other areas about how to provide the best support for students.

Have a quiet space, computers and internet facilities available at your service for students completing assignments and homework.

4. Don't rely on literacy skills to advertise or run your programs

Consider a range of verbal strategies for advertising that includes:

- streetwork: speaking to young people face to face in areas where they hang out
- outreach work to schools: speaking at school assemblies or in the playground at lunch time
- providing a phone information service and

WORKING WITH ... **EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS**



have regular updates on your answering machine about upcoming events

- participating in local community radio interviews.

Remember that young people with a low level of literacy may be nervous about attending your service because they may not like to admit they cannot read or cannot read well.

If young people need to fill out a form to access the service always give them an option of filling it out themselves or you filling it out for them while you go through the questions together.

Make sure any information given in a written format to young people is also given verbally. For example, if you are holding a camp, have an information meeting in the lead up to the camp where you talk about what will be happening and what young people will need to bring.

Check that young people can access your service without being able to read. For example check that it is clear where your service is located if you are in a multi-purpose centre, or what time your service is open if you are away from the premises.

Try to avoid situations where young people feel stigmatised for not being able to read well, eg. by asking young people to fill out a survey or do a reading exercise as part of a groupwork program.

5. Incorporate literacy and numeracy skills into your program

A good way of supporting students who experience learning difficulties is to incorporate literacy and numeracy skills into the fun programs you run.

For example if you have a group of young people who want to run a band night you can

work with them on:

- *numeracy skills* such as budgeting for the event, working out how many drinks to buy, ticketing, counting income, working out how many songs can fit into a play list for each band etc
- *literacy skills* such as writing a media release, writing information for flyers, writing an evaluation etc.

Literacy and numeracy skills can be incorporated into just about any program.

6. Help connect early school leavers back into education

There are a number of programs which can assist early school leavers such as the Links to Learning Community Grants Program. This program assists young people aged 12 to 24 years who have left school early or who are students at risk of leaving school early, and provides them with a range of opportunities to remain in or re-enter mainstream education and training.

The program delivers programs such as creative, recreational or arts-based activities as well as case management services to link participants back to education and training options.

Contact details for Links to Learning and Jobs Placement, Employment and Training Program (JPET) services are listed at the end of this section.

Many TAFE colleges can also provide free outreach courses at your venue. By speaking with your local TAFE you may be able to negotiate a course which suits the interests of the young people you work with.



COMMON MYTHS

Myth 1: Young people who leave school early are unintelligent

Some young people leave school early to take up or pursue other employment and training opportunities such as apprenticeships.

Some young people leave school early because they are uninterested or not coping with academic studies. However many of these young people can successfully participate in employment opportunities in non-academic fields or successfully continue their education when their life is more stable.

Mainstream schooling may not suit some young people but TAFE or alternative schooling may meet the needs of these young people.

WORKING WITH ... **EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS**



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Early school leavers

How accessible is your service?

Use this checklist to identify how you can improve your service for early school leavers

Partnerships

- Your service has partnerships with local schools to help support young people at risk Yes No
- Your service has clear guidelines and protocols with your local school Yes No
- Your service provides a homework help service or refers young people to other homework help services Yes No

Promotion

- Your service uses a range of verbal communication strategies to promote your service Yes No
- Young people do not need to be able to read or write to access your service Yes No

Promoting literacy and numeracy skills

- Your service incorporates literacy and numeracy skills into your programs, including fun programs Yes No

Connecting young people to education

- Your service actively links young people back into education services such as school, tafe, tafe outreach, links to learning services or jpet services Yes No

WORKING WITH ... **EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS**



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Contact Services

South Penrith Youth Services Project

Phone: (02) 4721 5024
Address: PO Box 627,
Penrith, NSW, 2751
Web: www.spyns.org.au
Description: Provides a range of programs in schools including

- Girls can do anything: a self esteem and relationship building program for girls,
- Forward Thinking: a goal setting program,
- Rock and Water: a physical program focusing on relationship skills, self confidence, self control and skills in managing conflict,
- Resourceful Adolescent Program: an experiential resilience building program focuses on preventing depression, stress and anxiety.

TAFE Outreach Services

Phone: 131 870
Web: ww.tafensw.edu.au/students/support/outreach.htm

Description: Outreach Coordinators work with their communities, government and industry to identify the education and training needs of people who face barriers to accessing vocational education and training. The location, length, time and type of course are negotiated with each student group and may include modules from a range of TAFE NSW vocational courses. Barriers to accessing learning can include geographical and social isolation, language and cultural factors, financial hardship, lacking educational confidence, being unaware of opportunities to learn, a disability or family commitments.

Links to Learning services

Mamre Plains

for students at risk – general
Phone: (02) 9670 5321
Email: mamrel2l@tpg.com.au
Address: Lot 1 Mamre Road St Marys

Penrith Skills for Jobs Ltd

for students at risk – general
Phone: (02) 4732 6297
Email: chan@jobquest.org.au
Address: Penrith Youth Link, Suite 101, 114-116 Henry Street, Penrith 2750

Miimali Aboriginal Community Association

for students at Risk – ATSI
Phone: (02) 9835 4146
Email: miimali@miimali.com
Address: 42 Copeland Road, Emerton 2770

Mission Australia

for students at risk – general
Phone: (02) 9675 1022
Email: manczakd@missionaustralia.com.au
Address: 28 Ayres Grove, Mount Druitt 2770

Western Sydney Training and Education Centre

for early leavers - general
Phone: (02) 9832 4775
Email: wstec@bigpond.net.au
Address: 48 Bulolo Drive, Whalan 2770

Blacktown Youth Services Association

for students at risk – language backgrounds other than English
Phone: (02) 9831 2095
Email: l2l@bysa.org.au
Address: 15 First Avenue, Blacktown 2148

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Western Sydney Training and Education Centre

for early leavers – general

Phone: (02) 9832 4775

Email: wstec@bigpond.net.au

Address: The Workplace, 77 Main Street
Blacktown 2148

The Salvation Army

for students at risk – general

Phone: (020) 9831 4247

Email: maria.stornelli@aue.salvationarmy.org

Address: 15-21 Boiler Close Blacktown

JPET programs

Mission Australia - Mt Druitt / Blacktown

Phone: (02) 9675 1022

Email: kolosovsl@missionaustralia.com.au

Address: 28 Ayres Grove, Mount Druitt
Outreach service provided at BYSA
(Blacktown Youth Services Association) - 15
First Avenue, Blacktown

Web: www.missionaustralia.com.au

Miimali Aboriginal Community Association

Special Needs - Indigenous (15-18 years)

Phone: (02) 9835 4146

Email: miimali@miimali.com

Address: 42 Copeland Rd, Emerton,
2770

Web: www.miimali.com

Nepean Interyouth JPET Service

Phone: (02) 4722 3811

Email: pjpet@pnc.com.au

Address: Cnr 133 Henry St & Station St,
Penrith, 2750

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