

# Arabic Youth Project



**IMPROVED PARTICIPATION IN  
APPRENTICESHIPS AND TRAINEESHIPS BY  
YOUNG PEOPLE AND EMPLOYERS OF ARABIC  
SPEAKING BACKGROUND**

**FINAL REPORT**  
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**BY YOUNG PEOPLE AND EMPLOYERS OF ARABIC SPEAKING**  
**BACKGROUND**

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A transition coordinator model of provision has been trialled in South Western Sydney as part of the second and final stage of a project that seeks to reinforce vocational pathways for young people of Arabic speaking background and to increase the uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships by young people from these communities. All stakeholders including government schools in NSW DET South Western Sydney Region, TAFE NSW – South Western Sydney Institute, DET New Apprenticeship Centres, and the Arabic speaking background community have provided significant support for the project.

In September 2005 the Board allocated additional funds to the project to allow for:

- post-placement mentoring and support up to end May 2006 for the young people case managed into apprenticeships and traineeships
- evaluation of the outcomes for each of the young people case managed under the model
- consideration of options for sustaining the model with the Arabic speaking background community and applying it to other culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

The extended duration of the project also allowed for consideration of strategies that could build on the strengths of the model. These strengths were identified at the forum to reinforce vocational pathways for young people from Arabic speaking background (the forum) held in late 2005. The forum was conducted as part of the project and was chaired by Dr Paolo Totaro from the Board. One of the key benefits of the culturally targeted model that was identified at the forum was the significant contribution employers of Arabic speaking background had made to the project.

**SUSTAINING AND APPLYING THE MODEL TO OTHER CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE COMMUNITIES**

Participants at the forum considered the strengths of the culturally and linguistically targeted transition coordinator model and its possible application to other communities. Members of the Sudanese and Pacific communities who attended the forum endorsed the model and supported further investigation of its transferability to these communities.

As an outcome of the forum members of the NSW Youth Partnership with Pacific Communities joined the project steering committee. The transition coordinator also

continued to liaise with members of these minority communities. In each of these contexts there was strong endorsement for the transition coordinator model. It was however emphasised that some aspects of the model would need to be modified to accommodate the diverse issues and needs facing these communities.

In relation to the Pacific communities, the more limited employer base was highlighted as an issue. It was suggested that this could be addressed by placing a greater emphasis on identifying a diverse pool of employers who could offer culturally inclusive work placements.

A limited employer base also impacts on the Sudanese community. Other issues are also significant for this community however. The Sudanese community has a high number of recent arrivals who are dealing with resettlement issues including linguistic barriers and the effects of limited or interrupted education and war trauma. Reinforcement of vocational pathways and access to pre-vocational programs has been identified as particularly important for many of the young people from this community.

The need for early intervention and culturally and linguistically targeted approaches to reinforce vocational pathways for young people from each of the communities is being addressed in proposals currently being prepared for submission to the Board under the Structured Workplace Learning Innovation Fund (SWLIF). Three project initiation proposals have been drafted by the TAFE NSW Multicultural Education Unit to support this process. The proposals focus on the needs of young people of Arabic speaking background and from Pacific and African communities.

The transition coordinator has also liaised with St George Workplace Learning Partnership Inc and the Bankstown/Granville Industry Education Partnership Inc to outline the strengths of the culturally and linguistically targeted model and discuss its possible application to Local Community Partnerships (LCPs). These LCPs expressed considerable interest in the transition coordinator model. They were not in a position to commit to specific project initiatives however as they were in the process of developing their business plans.

The discussions indicate that individual LCPs are unlikely to be able to sustain a culturally and linguistically targeted model in its entirety due to funding limitations and small numbers of students. However, key elements of the model may be integrated into their operations. It is also possible that two or three LCPs may choose to work in partnership to sustain a targeted transition coordinator model. The targeted Structured Workplace Learning Innovation Fund projects referred to above are being drafted with consideration of this issue.

The transition coordinator model was also promoted to employment service providers and the Islamic community at a *Better Connections* workshop conducted in April 2006. This was a Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) initiative to develop strategies to support members of the Islamic community seeking employment in the Bankstown/Granville area. The transition coordinator was a keynote speaker. His presentation provided job network members, Centrelink staff, community workers and employment service providers with an opportunity to gain a

better insight into issues faced by young people of Arabic speaking background seeking pathways to employment.

## **MENTORING SUPPORT AND EVALUATION OF OUTCOMES FOR THE YOUNG PEOPLE CASE MANAGED INTO APPRENTICESHIPS OR TRAINEESHIPS**

### ***Outcomes***

A total of twenty eight young people of Arabic speaking background who were case managed under the project commenced employment. Eighteen of these young people were subsequently registered as apprentices or trainees.

Fourteen of the young people are currently continuing their apprenticeship or traineeship in: beauty therapy (4), hairdressing (1), electrical (1), butchery (2), paving and tiling (1), business administration (2), metals engineering (1), and plumbing (2).

Young people who had older siblings had a better understanding of pathways and career options. Students who had completed their HSC and/or pre-apprenticeship courses through TAFE NSW were also more likely to commit to their apprenticeship or traineeship for the long-term and had a better understanding of their work responsibilities.

Ten of the twenty-eight young people ceased employment prior to registration through the DET New Apprenticeship Centres (DETNAACs). These young people were early school leavers who had little or no prior exposure to the workforce and had limited support available to them through family, including older siblings. Most of these young people ceased at the time the transition coordinator was on leave overseas and not available to provide mentoring support.

Follow-up contact with these young people and the employers indicated that this lack of knowledge and experience was associated with unrealistic expectations of the workplace and low job satisfaction. These young people generally lacked the confidence, knowledge and the skills to undertake self-directed activity at the workplace. Employers also did not identify the greater need for sustained close supervision and mentoring support at the workplace.

Two of the participants in paving and butchery left very soon after commencement when they realised they were unable to commit to the demands of the trade. One returned to school and the other enrolled in a TAFE NSW literacy and numeracy course. While they did not continue their apprenticeship their on-the-job experiences provided them insights into the trade, the expectations of employers and of the additional skills they needed to succeed in their area of vocational interest.

In addition to the eighteen participants who were registered as apprentices or trainees, a further sixty eight young people were provided with information and guidance on employment based training and vocational pathways. This guidance and support broke down barriers and provided them with valuable advice and information about the workforce and the traineeship/apprenticeship process.

### ***Post-placement mentoring and support***

The case management and mentoring processes not only provided the young people, but also parents and employers, with invaluable personalised support. In providing this support the transition coordinator has:

- adopted a holistic approach linking participants, parents and employers
- facilitated and ensured on-going communication between all parties so as to identify and resolve issues at an early stage
- intervened to address issues identified by TAFE contacts who are supporting young people with more complex issues - this has included case conferencing involving the young person, parent and training provider
- provided information and support to employers of Arabic speaking background on a needs basis - in some cases both employers and young people needed clarification of the training requirements and the transition coordinator was able to support the young people concerned and negotiate their preference for delivery of training (generally off-the-job)

Most importantly, the transition coordinator resolved various issues by liaising with all parties, negotiating agreed responsibilities of the young person, employer and parent and by following up action that was agreed on.

The situations outlined below exemplify some of the many situations where the transition coordinator has provided post-placement support.

1. A young person was arriving late for classes and attending the workshop without protective gear even after being counselled and supported by the head teacher and the transition coordinator. The transition coordinator organised a case conference involving the teacher, parent and student and determined strategies to ensure that the young person improved his performance and was not subject to further disciplinary action. After ongoing and intensive support this young person has now settled into his training.
2. An apprentice was to be dismissed by his employer after a number of complaints had been made by customers. The transition coordinator intervened and negotiated the young person's continued employment. After additional complaints were received the transition coordinator organised for a transfer of the apprentice to a new employer. The new arrangement is proving satisfactory with no complaints being received about the young person.
3. Two participants who were asked to do menial tasks such as cleaning and repetitive tasks such as filing for most of the working day complained about what they perceived to be unfair treatment. The transition coordinator mentored the young people and negotiated more meaningful and varied tasks with the employers.

The transition coordinator's role was crucial in achieving sustained employment for these young people. The coordinator has forged and reinforced critical links between the young people, parents and employers. Strong professional

relationships have been formed between the employers and their new employees which have maximized positive outcomes.

### ***Support for parents***

Parental support was critical in the case management process and achieving outcomes, particularly for the younger participants. The transition coordinator provided information and support, generally in Arabic, that empowered them to take a more active role in supporting the young person post-placement.

The transition coordinator also sought to develop and reinforce a strong supportive relationship between the young person, employer and the parent/s.

Parents provided support by reinforcing the young person's work and study commitments and providing support to ease the transition from school to work. For instance, one mother drove a young person who did not have a license and who was required to start early to and from work everyday.

### ***Support for employers***

The employers of Arabic speaking background showed a strong sense of responsibility toward young people from the community and were very supportive of the model. They had a limited understanding of the apprenticeship/ traineeship process however, and needed post-placement information and support which was provided by the transition coordinator.

Post-placement, the transition coordinator provided information and advice to employers about the following:

- wages and working conditions for apprentices/ trainees
- training and related employer responsibilities, including payment of TAFE fees
- methods and support services to resolve conflict in the future
- potential extra benefits for the employers
- support from Centrelink for young people.

In addition the transition coordinator reinforced for employers that they were providing young people with worthwhile employment based training opportunities and that their expectations of participants needed to reflect this understanding.

### ***Support from the Board***

The Board, and in particular Dr Paolo Totaro, has shown a keen interest in the young people, employers and outcomes from the project. Dr Totaro was invited to meet some of the employers and employees. Four employers and five young people presented insights into issues they have been facing and their specific needs.

Employers visited showed a strong sense of community and a keen sense of social responsibility. The primary motivating factor in taking on an apprentice or trainee was investing in the community's future rather than the associated financial incentives.

Three of the four employers had not previously taken on an apprentice or trainee. It was evident that the transition coordinator had introduced the possibility to these

employers, supported them through to sign up and provided valuable post-placement support.

The employers considered that the availability of an officer with the knowledge and skills to work directly with the community was a critical factor contributing to the success of the project. They emphasised the need for sustaining such a point of contact.

The recent decision of the Board to investigate the potential of specialised group training services for young people of Arabic speaking background is most welcome. This creates an opportunity for a significant number of young people who have indicated a strong interest in undertaking work in skill shortage areas to gain employment. In addition it has the potential for the community as a whole to draw upon the considerable expertise and commitment evident amongst employers of Arabic speaking background.

## **CONCLUDING COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The transition coordinator model has proven to be effective in facilitating pathways and contributing to sustained employment for the young people who participated in the project. Key elements of the model that have contributed to its success and have been highlighted in this and previous reports to the Board are:

- early intervention to reinforce vocational pathways for young people at risk of leaving school early
- a holistic approach that strengthens links and cooperative effort amongst the key stakeholders (schools, young people, parents, TAFE NSW, employers, including those from the target community and employment service providers)
- a culturally and linguistically targeted model that allows for effective outreach and engagement with and participation by the target community.

### ***Recommendation 1***

There is potential for the model to be adopted by Local Community Partnerships in the future. In the interim it is recommended that the Board support initiatives that encourage inclusive practice by LCPs.

**It is recommended that** culturally and linguistically targeted projects be funded under the Structured Workplace Learning Innovation Fund to assist LCPs to develop best practice in working with young people from Arabic and other targeted communities.

### ***Recommendation 2***

The implementation of the transition coordinator model has also highlighted the need for early intervention and the benefits of students undertaking VET courses in Years 9 and 10 of high school.

**It is recommended that** VET course options be available to young people in Years 9 and 10 who are at risk of leaving school early with limited understanding of career options and vocational pathways.