



YARRUNGA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Learning Today For Tomorrow

'TAKING LEARNING TO THE LEARNERS'

Developing a learning community

**A COMMUNITY LEARNING PROJECT DEVELOPED
THROUGH THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN YARRUNGA
PRIMARY SCHOOL AND THE CENTRE, WANGARATTA**

Introduction

Yarrunga PS has developed a 'learning community' culture over the last 6 1/2 years. This is based on the premise that for our young people to reach their full potential academically, socially and emotionally they must be part of a strong and supportive community that models engagement, connectedness and learning. Consequently the school has endeavored to engage the parents and the community in the educational lives of our students. We examined this engagement and have many different levels but regard them equally important.

We set about developing a volunteer program at the school. We raised the profile of 'helpers' and now use the term volunteers. We renamed roles eg classroom helper to literacy and numeracy support, reading mums to literacy assistants.

To support and recognize the vital role our volunteers have in developing our learning community we connected with The Centre, Wangaratta (Adult Learning Provider) and discussed the concept of volunteering as adult learning and how we could support and recognize this.

We also viewed our volunteer roles as pathways to employment. Many of our Mums are or will be affected by the 'Welfare to work' requirements.

This is definitely a work in progress. There have been obstacles and hurdles along the way but with everyone's support and belief in the project we think we are 'getting it right'. The feedback from the volunteers and teachers and students is integral to the development of the project.

We are very grateful for the support and commitment from Danny O'Donoghue CEO and Tracey Mickle of The Centre and Neil Pryor, Principal of Yarrunga Primary School

I hope these few pages give you an insight into 'Taking the learning to the Learner', developing a learning community and what we believe are the key elements of our progress so far.

Angela

This is the introduction from the MOU between Yarrunga Primary School and The Centre. It gives you the background of each organization and the common philosophy we have which is the basis for our partnership's success

The Centre for Continuing Education Inc (The Centre) is a community based, not-for-profit adult community education organisation. The Centre is a registered provider of adult education and a registered training organisation capable of delivering accredited and non-accredited learning opportunities, based in Wangaratta and Benalla, and delivering throughout the region.

Yarrunga Primary School (YPS) is a Government primary school of 315 students in Wangaratta. The school has developed a culture of community involvement and partnerships to enhance learning opportunities for students and families. These partnerships include formal agreements with The Centre, Anglicare and the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation. The school also has ongoing partnerships with Wangaratta Rotary Club, the Rural City of Wangaratta, the Yarrunga Community Action Group and other community groups.

The underlying philosophy of both organisations is focused on the development of people through learning, and a commitment to building communities through learning. This delivery model is designed to meet the adult learning needs of the Yarrunga community in their own environment

This partnership is based on the understanding by both organizations that many adults in the Yarrunga area appear reluctant to engage with learning activities offered by, and at, adult learning organisations such as Open Door Neighbourhood House, The Centre and GOTAFE. However, there are a significant number of parents who interact with YPS and are already engaged in informal learning activities. These parents feel comfortable at the school and with school staff. In addition, the Federal Government's Welfare to Work initiative will mean that many people in the community will be required to undertake learning activities to satisfy their Centrelink obligations.

Why is Yarrunga Primary involved in volunteering and adult learning?

This project is also based on the research I completed through a Westfield Premier's Scholarship. This research examined models of community learning in the United Kingdom and the USA. The research indicated increased student learning outcomes and student engagement in learning through the development of community learning centres around schools.

To support the 'children' who attend our school we need to support their families. By providing more opportunities for families to participate actively within society we can enhance the learning outcomes of our students.

Schools are ideally placed to become part of a Community Learning Centre, a community hub that promotes life-long learning.

NEIL PRYOR, PRINCIPAL, YARRUNGA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Why would a primary school involve itself in adult education? This is a question that has been posed to me many times and one which I have gone over in my own head as well. The answer lies in the fact that Yarrunga PS is the hub of the local community. The school is a meeting place, resource and information centre for students, parents and the wider community. We meet the community at its point of need. The families with young children of primary school age have diverse needs that are often not met by other services. These parents come into the school on a regular, even daily basis and trust the school staff.

We also know that our school community values education. They know that their children need an excellent education to have a successful life and career in the future. It is important for our children to see the pathways to this success. They need to see learning as a lifelong journey, not just a means to a certificate or job. They need to see older students and adults learning.

Yarrunga's volunteer program and the partnership with The Centre is one branch of this modeling for our young people. We also have community volunteers, former students and secondary students on work-experience or as guest speakers who all share their learning journey with the students. They see their teachers and support staff learning through professional development, tertiary study and training programs. Examples are teachers completing masters programs and teacher-aides completing on-line courses. Achievements of staff, students, parents and community members are recognised publicly, showing the school community values learning and high-achievement.

We believe that improvements in skills, knowledge, employment opportunities, economic security and learning models in the home, will lead to better learning and engagement at school for the children.

Why is The Centre involved in the project at Yarrunga Primary School?

DANNY O'DONOGHUE, CEO of THE CENTRE

The Centre is continually striving for innovation when it comes to the delivery of adult learning to all learners, but with particular emphasis on the most disadvantaged and disengaged learners in the community.

Over the past twelve months we have been piloting a strategy that we have labeled 'taking learning to the learners'. The fundamental hypothesis that sits behind this strategy is the knowledge that many disengaged learners have an apprehension or even fear of the notion of learning. It's the idea that learning is "something I did at school and I couldn't do it then, so why could I do it now?"

After discussion between Angela Craven and staff from The Centre, we realised that there were parents of students at Yarrunga PS who were volunteering their time undertaking various tasks at the school, including library work, working on the Stephanie Alexander community garden project, etc. To be able to perform these tasks to an acceptable level they had to learn.

The Centre, with the assistance of Angela developed a non-accredited learning framework around what the volunteers were learning (using an adult education concept called 'A Frame') and supported the Yarrunga PS staff to ensure that the essential elements of the learning components were delivered.

The next step was to acknowledge what had been learnt by each individual by issuing a formal 'certificate of participation' specifying the student's name and the learning achievements.

The outcome from this project has been fantastic; we have been able to progress the participants' thinking about learning in a new way. There is evidence that participants are becoming enthusiastic about learning and are looking at other learning opportunities including those on offer at The Centre in a more formal learning environment and one that they hitherto would never have contemplated.

The project is a 'strengths- based' approach to community capacity building.....

We've never dwelt on "what we haven't got'. We have looked at the strengths of our school and our partners, and have worked together to create opportunities for our students and their families.

This is evident in how we have developed this project. The project recognizes the strengths of the volunteers and creates opportunities for them to build on these strengths and to learn new skills.

The volunteers are interested in the school, feel comfortable there and are familiar with many of the teachers and other staff. The school provides an open and welcoming environment for all, and is an ideal “first step” learning environment for these adults.

A key element of both models is engagement - meaningful relationships and valued participation by young people, their families and the community. It is also recognition of the parents and the community’s essential role in the life long learning of a child.

So how does the program work?

I have developed a volunteer program at the school. Parents and community members can formally apply to volunteer at the school. I discuss with the applicant what they would like to do and the area of the school they would like to work. All volunteers are required to have a current police check and working with children card. I check references if necessary. I then discuss with the appropriate staff members regarding the availability of a volunteer. I work very hard to find the correct match.

I inform volunteers about the recognition they can receive from The Centre for their learning while they are performing their role and the opportunities for further learning. Volunteers can enroll with The Centre through me.

All volunteer roles have a role description. I give these to Tracey and she matches them with elements of certificate courses. We also investigate further learning opportunities that can compliment volunteer roles. Tracey and I have meet regularly to discuss, re-evaluate and plan. Our goal is to develop a framework that can be used by other organizations. The enthusiasm, excitement and personal growth of the volunteers involved so far keeps us going.

I meet with volunteers as much as possible to talk about their roles how they are going and generally getting to know them. I am working very hard to develop a sense of community amongst the volunteers and the certificate courses – food handling and coffee making was a great vehicle for this. The course brought the volunteers together, gave them an opportunity to get to know each other better and to develop new friendships. It was very exciting when our volunteers received their first certificate from The Centre. We have set up our hall kitchen as a volunteer meeting place. There is a notice board and a display of photos. I publish a ‘Yarrunga Volunteers’ Newsletter on a regular basis. This contains information specifically for the volunteers- social notes, opportunities for adult learning and photos. This has proved quite popular.

I ask the volunteers opinions and advice as much as possible. I let them know I value their help. The notice board, newsletter, social activities are a result of these conversations. I ‘let go’ as much as I can so that the volunteers are ‘owning’ the process. Some days feel like one big conversation but this seems to be so necessary at the moment. It’s about reassurance, providing a sense of belonging, connectedness and the opportunity to make a difference in the

lives of others as well as your own. The linchpin is that we all want better for our kids.

These are the key elements that Tracey and I think are crucial to our successes so far....

- A 'community' culture within the school community we are all in this together
- Valuing the parents' and the community's role in our students reaching their full potential
- Commitment to the value of volunteering and our responsibility to ongoing training and development
- Volunteer policies procedures and guidelines
- We want volunteers to recognize their skills more broadly. We do this by encouraging them to first recognize their skills themselves.
- Being flexible and adapting the program to suit the individual needs of the learning community
- Our partnership is based on similar core values and philosophies
- Being able to see beyond the obvious..... the valuable informal learning that is occurring
- It's about creating the scaffolding... for life long learning
- It's hand up Not hand out
- A sense of humour and fun!!!

Yarrunga PS has developed a 'learning community' culture over the last 61/2 years. This is based on the premise that for our young people to reach their full potential academically, socially and emotionally they must be part of a strong and supportive community that models engagement, connectedness and learning. With this in mind my role has been to engage the parents & the community in the educational lives of our students. We examined engagement and have many different levels but regard them equally important. We then raised the profile of 'parent helpers' and now use the term volunteers. We renamed roles eg classroom helper to literacy and numeracy support, reading mums and literacy assistants.

To support and recognize the vital role our volunteers have in developing our learning community we connected with The Centre, Wangaratta (Adult Learning Provider) and discussed the concept of volunteering as adult learning and how we could support and recognize this. We also look at pathways to employment for our volunteers. Many of our Mums are or will be affected by the 'Welfare to work' requirements.

This is definitely a work in progress that addresses the individual needs of the volunteers. We identify the skills involved in the roles and how they link into accredited and non accredited courses. We look at ways of increasing the skills of volunteers eg The Centre offers an Intro to computers course, food handling and coffee making courses for volunteers. (We have The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden program in our school- volunteers work in the kitchen and the garden)

The anecdotal data has been truly amazing. Informal chats to our parents tell us that they feel better about themselves; they are feeling more confident to engage in further learning, they feel they will be more informed about their future pathways. This opportunity at the school base meets these parents at their place of need we have called 'Taking Learning to the Learner'.

Since the commencement of the program new possibilities are continually arising. We have work trainers wanting to talk with us. We hope to develop this as model so that it can be replicated across other schools and community organisations.

There have been systems put in place at our school to track, screen and manage the volunteers.

For more details of the Volunteer program at Yarrunga Primary School, please call

Angela Craven, Volunteer Coordinator on 03 57212682