

GROWING AND RESOURCING 'GREAT IDEAS' TO MAXIMISE IMPACT

Storied accounts of practice by the Tender Bridge

TENDER BRIDGE CASES OF SUCCESS: CASE 3

Waikerie Independent Learning Centre provides a flexible learning pathway for disadvantaged young people. Neil White is the Principal of Waikerie High School, and this is their story of seeking to address a real need for some of the youth in Waikerie and surrounding communities.

Waikerie High School

Waikerie High is a rural school, 170 kilometres from Adelaide. Situated on the river Murray, about 370 students from within the township and from the surrounding areas of Blanchetown, Morgan and Cadell attend the school. The township is well-serviced with sporting facilities, small businesses and key services, such as a local hospital, Police Station and excellent community facilities. Citrus and grape horticulture predominates.

The need

We were losing students that were disengaged in school. Without a pathway of learning (whatever form and shape that may take), the life options for these young people were being severely curtailed. The flow on social, economic and educational costs to the young people and the community were clear. The potential health and criminal implications were also a concern. Something had to be done.

With the change in legislation to require students to be earning or learning until the age of 17 years, an increased urgency was apparent to help address the obvious need in the community. This only added to the desire to do something proactive.

Getting started

The WHS leadership team recognised the need for alternative programs for students and young people in the community. The Assistant Principal, Margaret Schultz, with other regional staff, visited a similar centre in the South East. The centre at Mt Gambier has been very successful in re-engaging young people and were a wonderful source of ideas and support.

We strongly believe in the idea that schools function within their communities. Much of why the Centre 'got off the ground' boils down to a strong clear need and the willing involvement of different groups and resources from the community. These include, the South Australian Police Force, Rotary, local media and the Regional Education Office.

What is the Independent Learning Centre?

Waikerie's Independent Learning Centre (ILC) provides a flexible learning pathway for kids who might otherwise be further disadvantaged by their lack of learning options, resources and life skills.

The Centre targets disadvantaged youth, young parents, the unemployed youth who have not completed their secondary schooling, and youth with mental health issues or a disability.

Students are enrolled at Waikerie High School through the Innovative Community Action Networks (ICAN) program. This program covers funding for staff to cover case management and the purchase of materials for some learning programs offered through the Centre. These programs include literacy and numeracy, first aid, business skills, practical skills (eg welding and multi media) and TafeSA courses.

Part of the Centre's objective is about getting students to commit themselves to the program. Students are expected to attend the ILC two-three sessions each week. On the other days, the students work on their Individual Learning Plan activities (Lit and Num homework, personal budgeting, cooking etc), Work Experience, or registered training through a service provider (TafeSA welding course, Lit and Num certificate etc)

The personalised support and 'case management' approach are cornerstones to way the Centre staff interact with each student. Many of these students have not had positive experiences of schooling. As such, the social and emotional support is vital to ensure the young people develop these necessary skills in order to enter the workforce and make positive contributions to the community.

Waikerie High School's Governing Council, through the Principal, oversees the staffing and other governance matters of the Centre. Each fortnight the Centre's Manager, Greg Hatcher and staff meets with the school's leadership team to discuss issues and planning. There is a clear commitment from all parties to keep the innovative centre moving forward. A key focus in 2011 will be the accreditation of student learning towards SACE or nationally recognised training.

In 2009, the Education Department's Regional Office agreed to fund a pilot project for 15 students. In 2010 the Riverland region became an Innovative Community Action Network (ICAN) area. This meant Flexible Learning Option funding was available to support the program. The money from this program cannot be used for the costs associated with rent or utilities of the premises. Other funding sources need to be relied upon to support the capital investment. Fortunately the landlords have reduced the rent due to the nature of the initiative. This is typical of the community support shown towards the program!

The Centre's program operates from a rented house two kilometres away from Waikerie High School. As a school leadership group, we discussed for some time whether the Centre should be on the school's premises or somewhere else. Many of the kids we were trying to target had negative views and experiences of school. We did not want the 'school' environment to put these kids off and so made the decision to have it close by, but not actually 'onsite'. The students are able to access subjects at the school site and often use the school bus for transport. A FLO coordinator has been appointed in 2011 to assist with communications and accredited training.

Finding a fund listed on Tender Bridge

When setting up a Centre in a rented house and its program from scratch, the issue is not so much what do we need funding for? Rather, the question becomes what do we need to prioritise first?

By 2010, we now had 35 students enrolled. We needed to move to a new premise. This of course, brought new challenges of how we were going to furnish the place! I saw that the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) Rural Education Program. What I noticed was that this grant would support infrastructure items. I wrote an application and we received \$6050 to purchase a range of furnishing items including, fridge, desk, oven filing cabinets and conference table. All of which were basic requirements, if we were going to provide somewhere for the students and staff of the Centre to sit and store their lunch!

One of the courses we wanted to make available to the students was a TAFE Welding course. We applied to the Max e Grants program (an initiative of Barnardos and OfficeMax®) for \$1,200. The grant would support the purchase of overalls, books and safety gear for the students. Without these, the students could not have participated.

In addition to these two grants, we also sought and gained the support from the Local Council. The Council agreed to support the program with an annual donation to the value of \$2,000. That's money, we can redirect into the quality and breadth of programs on offer.



Case manager Cassie Golding works with a student at the new tables provided through a grant from FRRR.

At the start of 2011, 57 students have enrolled at the Waikerie Independent Learning Centre. The word is getting out and we have young people from the surrounding areas (and beyond) engaged in a flexible pathway of learning and new possibilities. In the space of three years the numbers have increased nearly four-fold!

Lessons learned

- 1 **Impact:** Know what impact you are trying to make by doing a particular program/project/initiative
- 2 **Pithy overview:** Communicate the impact of your educational project in a pithy sentence or two – 'The Waikerie Independent Learning Centre seeks to re-engage young people in vocational learning pathways towards productive citizenship'
- 3 **Budget set up:** Create a separate line item for every source of funding you receive. It will save you a lot of time when it comes to acquitting your grant. Your finance officer will thank you too!!
- 4 **Staffing and leadership:** Invest in the 'right' staff and then make sure that the appropriate leadership support is available (i.e. principal and regional office)
- 5 **Monitor progress:** We review the number of students who complete the TAFE Certificate 1 & 2 and specific short-courses, such as First Aid. We note any awards our students receive (e.g. last year 4 students received a new media award. We also monitor attendance rates. This is especially important, given a key objective of the Centre is to re-engage students.
- 6 **Celebrate success:** There are positive cultural spin-offs. In our case, we invite the local media to do stories on key activities. The local newspaper has written a number of articles promoting the successes of students including the runner up award in the New Media awards, welding course at TAFE (Highlighting the support received from Barnardos) and the new furnishings being put to good use in cooking lessons (FRRR Rural Education funding). It's a great way for the media and those in the local community to understand the positive work being done by the students through the Centre. It also provides a public way to acknowledge any funders. Keep a record of any media stories and photos that can be used as part of your acquittal of a fund.
- 7 **Be prepared to take a risk:** 'If you see a need, have a go at addressing it'

Waikerie High School is a Tender Bridge subscriber.

(Case written by Michelle Anderson based on an interview with Neil White and edited by Emma Curtin)

Tips:

- 1 There are many funds 'out there'. What I tend to do is scan the Weekly Alerts from Tender Bridge. If I don't think the target group of the funder fits our Centre's target group, then I don't go any further. Time is too scarce to waste chasing funds that simply do not fit our focus.
- 2 Check the eligibility requirements!! You might fit the target group, but what you are seeking funding for (e.g. equipment, travel support) might fall outside the grant maker's criteria
- 3 Be specific about what you are seeking the funding for – if it is to purchase a fridge, then say so
- 4 Be realistic about the dollar amount you need but don't go outside the boundaries of what the grant maker says they typically fund (e.g. In 2010, the Max e Grants program made it very clear that they provide 'small grants' of up to '\$5,000)
- 5 Include other staff in your thinking and submission of application. There are often different ways of looking at potential projects and funding arrangements.