Coping with the Modern Teenager!
Parents’ Community Forum
20 June 2012

Evaluation Report

* The Campbelltown Family Town initiative is a partnership of: Supported by
Overview of the Partnership Underpinning this Forum

Based on the fact that 20% of young people in Eastern Adelaide do not attain year 12 or equivalent, AITEC (partnership broker for the region), initiated conversations in 2010 with community, educators, youth workers and young people in the Campbelltown area to explore how attainment could be improved.

Derived from that exploratory research and the evidence of low educational achievement at some “cold spots” in the Campbelltown area and surrounding districts, AITEC investigated the potential of a partnership-based approach with a number of stakeholders. Subsequently, the “Campbelltown Family Development” partnership was developed in collaboration with:

- Campbelltown City Council;
- Workskil;
- Rotary Club Magill Sunrise;
- Rotary Club Campbelltown; and
- Rotary Club Morialta.

The partnership Campbelltown Family Development aims to provide information and tools to maximise parental and young people’s engagement with education, inform them about future pathways and their link to successful attainment with a whole of community approach. It is intended to build capacity in the parents and youth communities and to focus on what can make a difference in young people’s attainment and participation in both education and the community.

Campbelltown Family Development has the following objectives:

- providing parents/carers with the capacity and tools to support their young people (12-18 yo target):
  - harnessing and integrating the community for youth development support;
  - family engagement in their children’s learning and development;
  - retention, transition and attainment support.

- personal and professional development of the community youth (12-18 target):
  - engagement of youth with community; and
  - retention and attainment support.

The partnership actions comprise interactive workshops/forums for parents/caregivers of young people in the Campbelltown Council area to provide information and resources that will assist in supporting their children through school. The partners intend to deliver a forum on parent identified needs, concerns and challenges in alternate school terms.

A future initiative proposed by the partners is an interactive “Youth Speak” forum to engage with young people about their needs and elicit their view of how they can be better supported by their community. It is anticipated that this will develop into ongoing forums and workshops specifically to build capacity in the region’s youth.

Parents’ Community Forums

In July 2011, conversations started between AITEC (Partnership Broker) and Workskil (Youth Connections provider) in the Adelaide Eastern region in regard to recurring regional needs. Workskil advised that there is an evident need to build capacity in parents who require further information or guidance to better support their kids to overcome youth issues which impact on participation in education, employment and life. In this early exploration, a series of seminars to inform parents was discussed. It was decided to hold seminars where there was the greatest need and both AITEC and Workskil agreed that, based on research and evidence, this was the Campbelltown Council area.
When Campbelltown City Council joined the discussions and then the partnership as the lead agency and Chair at the beginning of 2012, the partners worked in the alignment and decided to launch the first Parents’ Community Forum to:

- highlight the importance of family engagement in learning; and
- provide resources, tools and strategies for parents/carers to support young people.

**Coping with the Modern Teenager Forum**

**Focus Issues**
The key issues selected by the partners in accordance with local needs to be addressed by the first parents’ community forum named “Coping with the Modern Teenager” were:

- communication between parents and their teens;
- how to manage frustration and anger – from the parents and their teen’s perspectives;
- educational challenges faced by teenagers;
- youth concerns; and
- some other topics collected from parents as they responded to the forum invitation.

**Presenters**
*Coping with the Modern Teenager!* was held on 20 June 2012 and featured:

- Keynote speaker:
  - Kirrilie Smout, Clinical Psychologist specialising in young children and teenagers. Kirrilie has received several awards, including the Australian Psychological Prize (1994) and the National Speakers Association Rising Star Award (2001).

- Question and Answer Discussion Panel:
  - Peter Champion (Intra Agency Support Worker – Department for Education and Child Development);
  - Nancy Niemann (Youth Specialist - Job Services Australia); and
  - Sam Ricci (Eastern Apprenticeship Broker - Dept. of Education and Child Development)

- Mini-expo of organisations keen to help parents better support their teens. The exhibitors at this forum were: Centacare, Scouts, Campbelltown – YAC, Workskil and Sammy D Foundation.
Contributions

The forum was possible thanks to a financial or in-kind participation from all of the partners. Workskil contributed by sponsoring the speaker and selecting, inviting and organising the panel members; the Campbelltown Council provided the facilities, catering, the marketing collateral, distribution channels (poster, flyer, Messenger, via schools, churches, etc) and assigning resources to receive RSVPs and collect questions/concerns from parents. The three Rotary Clubs promoted the event at different locations (e.g. the Magill Rotary Market) and the Rotary Magill Sunrise club sponsored the gifts for the panel members.

In its role as the Partnership Broker, AITEC brought the partners together and supported them with the secretariat and logistics required for the forum, prepared a Parent Handbook with career pathway resources for their teenagers, prepared the presentation sequence and running sheet, acted as MC for the event and distributed the promotional flyer to primary and secondary schools across the three sectors in the Eastern Adelaide region.

It is noteworthy to mention that the forum was also promoted by several local schools – interestingly many of them Catholic schools - which published the forum information in their newsletters.

Attendance

On the night, parental attendance surpassed the partners’ expectations with overall attendance of 43 people with at least 30 of them being parents of teenagers. It was pleasing that the Principal of one of the local high schools attended the forum as well.

The program of “Coping with the Modern Teenager!” was planned and scheduled as indicated below:

7:00 – Welcome and Context
7:10 – Campbelltown Council Social Plan
7:15 – Keynote speaker
8:00 – Questions
8:15 – Coffee break
8:25 – Q&A session w/ panel members
8:45 – Forum Evaluation Survey
8:50 – Networking/Mini-expo/Supper time
9:00 – Close

Key Messages

The keynote speaker’s presentation addressed parents’ concerns under 6 comprehensive strategies:

• Understand teenagers;
• Get to know the details about what is going on for teens;
• Hear and acknowledge their struggles;
• Help them problem-solve;
• Compassionately stick to the non-negotiables; and
• Give regular messages of love, admiration and empathy.

During the Questions and Answers session with the panel, parents had the opportunity to learn more about services provided by the Intra Agency Support services from DECD, school based apprenticeships and about Job Services Australia. Questions/concerns were raised by parents such as:

• What can I do if my teenager is no longer engaged with mainstream schooling?
• Should I enforce my daughter’s intention to be now a hairdresser instead of finishing Year 12?
• What age can young people legally leave school?
• I have asked for support at my son’s school but nothing has happened to keep my son engaged at school.
• If a young person is still at school, are they able to start an apprenticeship before leaving school?
• My child has dyslexia and this affects their learning, however, the education department does not consider this a disability and there is no assistance available at school, where can I get help?

Success Factors

Key factors to the success of the forum were the collection of questions or concerns expressed by parents as they registered for the forum and negotiation with the keynote speaker to shape the presentation prior to the forum. Insight to the identified needs, concerns and challenges will also be useful to inform and shape future forums. The concerns identified by parents prior to the forum included:

• dealing with attitude and the role of step parents;
• gaming addiction and lack of respect for parents;
• wagging at school;
• concerns regarding social media networks such as; facebook, twitter etc; and
• alcohol and drug issues.
Coping with the Modern Teenager! – Forum Evaluation Survey

A survey was distributed amongst the parents attending the event to gather their feedback about this forum. 13 responses were received from parents with the outcomes indicated below.

Questions 1-7 (number of parents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) The forum information was valuable</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) The keynote presentation was relevant and useful to me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) The panel covered relevant topics</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) I improved my knowledge about how to manage issues faced by</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teenagers</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) I recognise the important role of parents in supporting their</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teenagers with their learning</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) As a result of “Coping with the Modern Teenager” I feel more</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confident in supporting my child(ren)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) I am better informed about where can I find resources to help me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support my teen(s)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 8
How did you find out about the forum?

- Local Schools
- Campbeltown City Council (website, newsletter, at the Council)
- Workskil
- Rotary Clubs (at the Campbelltown market)
- AITEC's eAlert / website
- Local newspaper
- Other (flyer, MOSH, email to work, my playgroup Coord. gave me a leaflet)

Question 9
Which were the two best aspects of the “Coping with the Modern Teenager!” forum – why?

- Keynote speaker (9 parents indicated so) – her strategies, speech, notes provided, presentation informative and helpful (“Learned a lot”).
- Panel Q&A session
- Opened it up that we are not alone
- All great information
- Meeting with professionals working with teenage issues
- Ideas on how to deal with issues
- How teenagers think and what is important to them because understanding them would help me.
- Mini-expo – picked up info and leaflets to take away and read later.

Question 10
What are the two key challenges you are experiencing with your teenager?

- Attitude, language;
- Communication issues (how to communicate with them/generally non-communicative/knowing how they feel);
- Use of IT (facebook, phone, overuse of screens, etc);
- Wagging school if certain friends of his do not want to go;
- School attendance;
- Lack of motivation at school;
- Not being truthful about nearly everything;
- Friends issues;
• Homework issues (staying on task with homework);
• As a step parent, how to connect with teens (seen as the enemy); and
• Sleeping.

**Question 1**
Which of these challenges is/are impacting on your teen’s learning?

• School attendance/Not going to school;
• Sleeping;
• None really. He is doing well at school;
• Everything;
• Impact of peers/Friends issues;
• Time management, not enough sleep;
• Reluctance to “open-up”; and
• Homework issues.

**Question 12**
What other topic would you like to be informed about?

• “Anything related to teens”;
• Messages filtered through media and the impact on kids and how to deal with this;
• Step parent information;
• How teenagers are to be educated on harmful effects of alcohol and drugs. (MP) John Gardner’s bill to make it illegal for adults to serve alcohol to under 18 year olds in their home;
• The keynote talk covered several aspects. I feel a need to follow-up on these, to learn how best I can put them into use.

**Conclusion**
Feedback from the forum highlights that the format is a fantastic success with parents who have expressed their lack of awareness of some of the programs available at public schools to help parents support their kids to reengage in education.

What was also highly pleasing to note was that there were immediate and specific positive outcomes, which included:

• the first referral of a disengaged teen to Workskil the very next day after the forum;
• multiple calls and emails from parents to the Campbelltown Council the day after, to enquire about the next forum; and
• comments from parents at the forum expressing their relief that they are not and do not need to be alone in supporting their kids’ education.

With this positive response to the first of the partnership’s actions, the partners are even more committed to maintain their joined-up approach to support parents and their teenagers for achievement.

**Sasha Dragovelic and Laura Garcia Rubio**
AITEC
*School Business Community Partnership Broker, Adelaide Eastern & Hills Region*

*June 2012*