



The Hume Under 16 Project

Out of School - Out of Sight

Final Report

June 2012



Acknowledgements

This report has been prepared by Peter Kellock from The Asquith Group on behalf of the Hume Whittlesea Youth Connections Consortium and the Hume Whittlesea Local Learning and Employment Network Inc.

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Executive Summary

1. Introduction

The Hume Under 16 Project is a joint initiative between the Hume Whittlesea Youth Connections Program (NMIT is the Lead Agent) and the Hume Whittlesea LLEN.

The City of Hume covers the suburbs of Broadmeadows, Coolaroo, Craigieburn, Campbellfield-Somerton, Dallas, Gladstone Park, Greenvale, Jacana, Roxburgh Park, Tullamarine, Sunbury and Westmeadows. Young people in the City of Hume aged 10-19 years make up 15.5% of the Hume population, which is much higher than the average youth component of the total population across other Melbourne LGAs. Almost 30% of the population of Hume was born overseas.

Data for Hume provides some alarming characteristics which include:

- Poor educational outcomes
- High youth unemployment
- High levels of disconnection
- High reporting of mental health issues
- Increased trends in anti-social behaviour
- High levels of developmentally vulnerable children

In particular, Hume has low levels of educational attainment among young people under 16 years. The 2006 census figures show that 35.7% of students in Hume had left school in Year 10 or below, which is much higher than the Melbourne Statistical Division (MSD) average of 27.9%.

The implementation of the Youth Connections Program from 2010 and information gathered by the Hume Youth Commitment reinforced concerns in the community about the extent of poor educational outcomes and engagement for young people in this age group. The Hume Under 16 Project was undertaken to gain an understanding of the extent of disengagement in Hume, and to develop informed responses to the issue.

2. Project Aims

The Hume Under 16 Project aimed to:

- identify the number of young people under 16 years of age in the City of Hume who are disengaged from school, education and training;
- assess the forms of support available to these young people; and
- develop recommendations for a strategy to re-engage them.

This report has been developed to provide this information to key government departments (particularly Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and Australian Government Department of Human Services, school staff (particularly principals and senior managers) relevant community organisations, and to local government.

3. Project Scope

The project focussed on young people in Hume aged between 10 and 16 years who were either:

- completely disengaged; or
- whose school attendance did not exceed three or four days a week, indicating a potential for disengagement.

4. Research Findings

The research is based on 2011 data collected from local schools, agencies, young people and families in Hume using a combination of existing studies, surveys and interviews.

The data relates to government and catholic sector schools in Hume involving seven government secondary schools and two catholic colleges.

The research findings summarised below are detailed in the body of the report.

A total enrolment in government secondary schools in Hume for those under 16 years in 2011 is estimated at approximately 4,500 young people. Of this group research indicates that:

Many young people under the age of 16 attend school on an irregular basis.

Schools reported that:

- 4.5% (215 young people) are missing one day of school each week on average
- 1.3% (68 young people) are missing more than 2 days of school each week
- As a result, a total of 5.8% (283 young people) in Hume are missing from school at least an average of one day a week (or 40 days per year) **which is more than three times the average student.**

An additional number of young people under 16 years have completely disengaged from school.

- 172 young people in the age group were reported by agencies operating in Hume as having been in contact during 2011.
- Of these 172 young people, 112 (2.4% of the school enrolment) were reported as not attending school.
- The young people accessing the services were predominantly male and from English speaking backgrounds.
- Government schools reported having expelled 26 young people under the age of 16, and a further 3 had been still enrolled but were unable to be contacted

In total there were 395 young people aged under 16 in Hume attending school irregularly or not at all.

The majority of those young people completely disengaged from school appear to be 13-15 years old.

- This is consistent with Victoria Police and Juvenile Justice data where the majority of contact occurs from age 13 onwards.
- A few are completely disengaged at 11, but it is at 13 years old that the numbers begin to increase.
- Patterns of irregular attendance often commence early in primary school years.
- A standard period of complete school disengagement in this age group lasts between 18 to 24 months
- Multiple instances of school disengagement in the one family are not uncommon.

There are few alternative education / school re-engagement options available for those aged under 16 in Hume.

- Current programs offered are generally only available for those aged 15 years and over.
- Teaching Units and other re-engagement programs offer only short term assistance.
- Alternative programs adjacent to the Hume region (e.g. Pavillion School, The Island) are difficult to access and service few Hume students.

5. Contributing Factors

Interviews with young people indicated that the following factors increased the likelihood of disengagement:

Expulsion / asked to leave school: Being expelled from school, then commencing at a new school for a month or two, before ceasing to attend altogether;

Transition: Transitioning from primary to secondary school. Attending the new school for a short period and then disengaging altogether.

High mobility: Families relocating due to housing rental changes resulting in young people changing schools, losing contact with peers or requiring longer travel.

Disability: High levels of disability and in particular young people with low IQ who are also just ineligible for additional support or special school education.

Ineffective parenting and family dysfunction: Parents lacking the ability to set limits and establish routines around school and work leading to young persons' inability to make it to school on a regular basis.

Negative school experience of parents: Parents who themselves have had unsuccessful or unsatisfactory school experiences finding it difficult to relate to and engage with schools, placing less importance on their child's attendance and engagement with school.

Acting as a carer: Young people remaining at home to act as a carer to family members, particularly where a parent has a mental illness and /or drug and alcohol dependence.

On-line bullying: Young people are increasingly disengaging from school for lengthy periods due to on-line bullying.

6. Data Collection Issues

- The data used to inform research findings does not include data from Independent schools in Hume. The project was also unable to source data from the Victorian Department of Human Services.
- There is extremely limited capacity to track young people who are not enrolled in or attending school, or to quantify the numbers engaged in non-school based programs.
- The lack of options available to those under 16 contributes to their invisibility, as they are ineligible for many alternative education programs or for income support.
- The focus of Government data collection on school disengagement commences at 15 years of age, when there is evidence that some young people of that age have not been going to school for several years.
- As with the education services, some welfare and community organisations indicate that their client group are predominantly male and of English speaking backgrounds. This suggests that young women and those from linguistically diverse backgrounds are much less likely to access mainstream services and therefore are underrepresented in the data collection.
- Research findings are considered to significantly understate the actual extent of disengagement in Hume. In addition to the lack of incentive for young people under 16 to contact services for assistance, young people interviewed for this research all indicated that they personally knew of between three and six other individuals under the age of 16 who were also not attending school. This suggests that the extent of disengagement may be even larger than has been identified by schools and agencies.

7. Re-engagement – What Works

Research suggests that there are four key requirements to assisting young people under the age of 16 to re-engage with education and training:

- Making real and enduring connections
- Meeting their welfare needs
- Providing learning opportunities relevant to needs; and
- Providing pathways that link learning to practical future opportunities

Young people interviewed in Hume indicate that there are a number of enablers that helped them re-engage with education.

Supportive Relationships:

The importance of having a supportive relationship with staff involved in the re-engagement process. This reflects a need to feel connected to one or more people involved in the re-engagement process.

Applied Learning Options:

Access to a curriculum that provides diverse applied 'hands on' learning opportunities such as a VCAL prior to Year 10.

Flexible Learning Environments:

Opportunities to combine part-time school with other activities can assist some young people on the edge of disengagement. Some young people find it difficult to cope with full-time school, and start to absent themselves rather than having a structured opportunity to combine school with other activities which could also assist in developing skills.

Parental Involvement:

The relationship between family members and schools can influence patterns of school attendance and engagement. The Family-School Partnership Framework provides supporting structures to assist and improve parent engagement in a young person's learning.

8. Recommendations

1. The Hume City Youth Advocacy Group should be responsible for advocating for the recommendations contained in this report.
2. The capacity of mainstream schools to provide all students with flexible and responsive learning options (particularly those who are most vulnerable) should be improved.
3. Promote hub based projects (including a pilot demonstration project) with and between local schools to improve student engagement with a focus on:
 - Primary to secondary transition
 - Parent engagement in student learning using the Family-School Partnership Framework
 - Developing applied learning options for Years 7 to 9
 - Flexible learning options
4. Develop a local alternative education pathway option for the 12-15 age group that combines an education and a welfare focus, provides practical and applied education pathways, and places an emphasis on supportive relationships with students.
5. Explore models of active school re-connection for young people aged 12-15 years that both schools and other agencies jointly fund and deliver within the City of Hume. These might combine aspects of existing programs such as Finding My Place, Moving Forward and the case management component of Youth Connections.
6. Improve Commonwealth State and local data collection processes to enable more accurate identification of young people under the age of 16 who are not attending school.
 - Development of an agreed data collection approach with local schools and agencies in Hume;
 - Annual collection of relevant data (in terms 2 or 3), in partnership with Youth Connections and HWLLEN;
 - Promotion to Catholic and Independent schools and government agencies to participate in the annual data collection process.

The Hume Under 16 Project

1. Introduction

The Hume Under 16 Project was developed to identify how many young people under 16 years of age in the City of Hume are disengaged from school, education and training, assess what form of support were available to these young people, and develop recommendations for a strategy to help re-engage them.

The project was commissioned by the consortia partners of the Hume Whittlesea Youth Connections program and by the Hume Whittlesea LLEN.

The new 2012 State Government Youth Statement “Engage, Involve, Create” provides relevant policy context for the project¹. The Statement supports the use of partnerships to deliver the aims and priorities including “ensuring young people are engaged in education and training, further education and training pathways, and employment”.

This will increase opportunities for young Victorians to be engaged in:

“Education and training that is accessible, flexible and relevant; that empowers them with choice and provides transferable skills like adaptability, responsiveness and lateral thinking.”²

The Statement notes that difficulty in finding a job; low school attainment and health and wellbeing issues are often intergenerational. As a result, schools are encouraged to engage parents in their child’s learning and provide a platform for greater support to young people and their families. Government and communities will help vulnerable young people and their families to access education, training and community participation programs and funding.

The project originated in the concern of staff in the Youth Connections program operating across the northern region of Melbourne that there may be significant numbers of disengaged young people who were under the age of 16. These concerns were strengthened by reports from local agencies such as Brunswick Youth Services that they had increasing waiting lists from young people under the age of 16 for entry to their support program.

The project was interested in young people aged between 10 and 15 years who were both completely disengaged, as well as those whose attendance record at school was poor.

An initial scoping report on educational disengagement among under 16 year olds commissioned by Youth Connections across the northern region of Melbourne in 2010 had found that there was evidence of quite large numbers of disengaged young people under 16 years of age when the whole of the northern region was considered.³

Of particular concern are the limited options available to young people under the age of 16 if they become disengaged from school. They are not eligible for support through Youth Allowance, they are unable to gain legal employment (unless granted an exemption at age 15), are too young to qualify for community based education programs such as community VCAL, as well as many support programs available to those aged 16 and over.

¹ *Engage Involve Create – Youth Statement* Victorian Government, Melbourne, April 2012

² *ibid*

³ *Report on educational disengagement of young people under 15 years of age in the Northern region*, Combined Northern Region Youth Connections Consortia 2010

The lack of options contributes to the invisible nature of this group of disengaged young people. Since they are ineligible for many support programs as well as for income support, they can remain largely invisible to the education system and to other agencies unless they come into contact with human services workers and others dealing directly with their families.

This is reflected in how government collects data on disengagement. ABS statistics on *Educational Attainment: Early School Leavers* provides data only on those aged 15 and older. There is extremely limited capacity to track young people who are not enrolled in or attending school, or to quantify the numbers engaged in non-school based programs.⁴

Methodology

The project was based on a series of data sources. It commenced with a desktop review of key documents including *The Report on educational disengagement of young people under 15 years of age in the Northern region (2010)* and various reports of the Hume Whittlesea LLEN.

Interviews with staff from ten local agencies and seven government schools were used to map the service system, canvass issues and develop agreement on a format in which consistent and comparable data could be collected from schools, local agencies and key government departments. Separate interviews with eight young people contacted through local agencies were arranged and used to identify key issues and develop the case studies included in this report.

Data availability

A primary focus of this project was to try to discover as precisely as possible how many young people in the 10-15 year age group were not attending school.

To achieve this, the project was designed to obtain data from all schools within the City of Hume on young people at risk of disengagement, and on those in the process of becoming disengaged. Government schools and the northern regional office of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) were all highly co-operative and provided the requested data in de-identified form. Two catholic sector secondary schools also provided data.

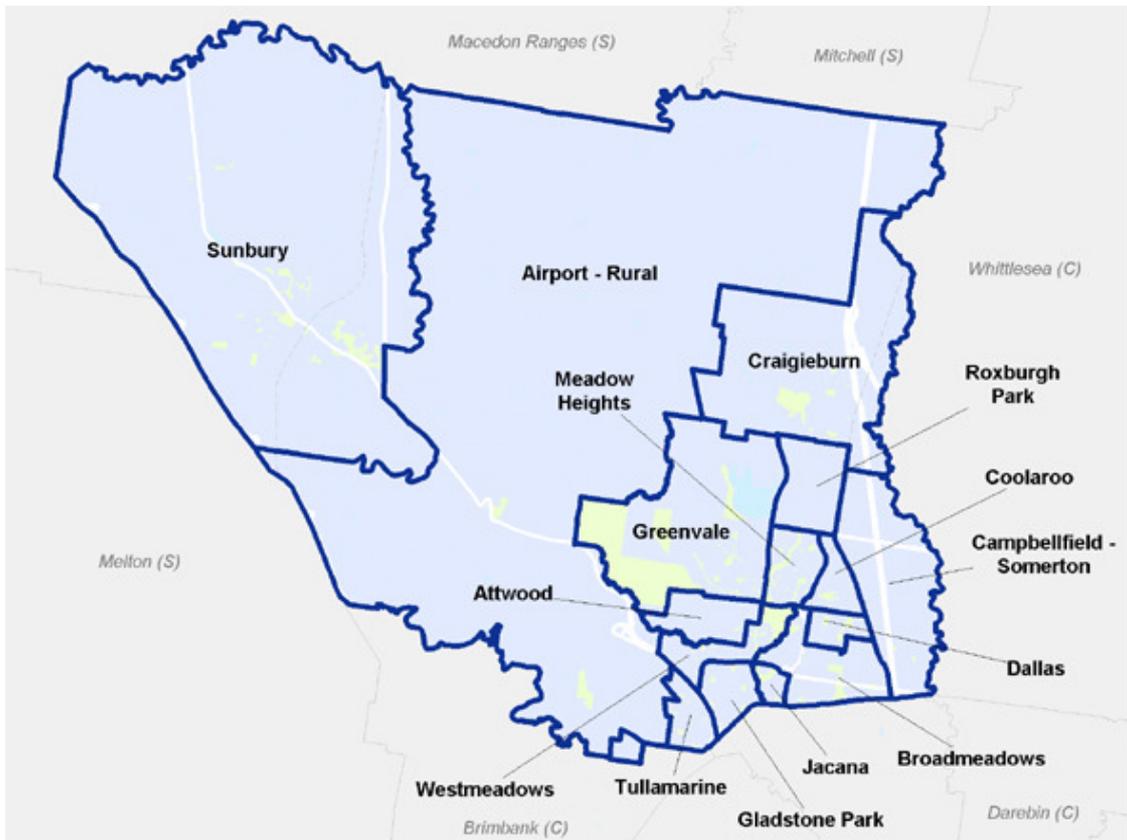
To identify the number of young people in the under 16 age group who had completely disengaged from school, data was sought from all government and not for profit organisations that might come into contact with this group of young people.

Unfortunately, while most local agencies provided data in the format requested, the Victorian Department of Human Services which holds key data on vulnerable young people in this age group who may not be attending school, declined to provide data, citing the requirements of the Privacy Act. As a result, the number of young people in the age group able to be identified through their engagement with local services may be much lower than the actual numbers. Interviews with young people and agencies indicate frequent instances of multiple members of the 10-15 age group within one family who are all not attending school, or attending on an extremely irregular basis.

⁴KPMG, *Re-engaging Our Kids Framework for Education Provision to Children and Young People at Risk of Disengaging or Disengaged from School*, DEECD 2009

2. Profile of the City of Hume

Hume City is located on Melbourne's North West fringe, between 15 and 45 kilometers from the Melbourne GPO. It is bounded by the Shires of Macedon Ranges and Mitchell to the north, the City of Whittlesea to the east, the Cities of Moreland and Brimbank to the south and the Shire of Melton to the west.



Source: Hume City's Young People Profile and Demographics Projected Populations Draft – 27-05-09

Culturally diverse

It has a very culturally diverse population with over 140 nationalities speaking 128 languages other than English at home, with 29.24% of the population being foreign born. The most prominent languages spoken include Turkish, Italian and Arabic.

SEIFA Index of Socio-economic Disadvantage

According to the SEIFA Index of Socio-economic disadvantage, Hume has an overall moderate to low ranking (SEIFA 965.2) when compared to all Local Government Area populations across Australia. Suburbs within the Hume LGA experience a broad range of socio-economic outcomes, from less advantaged Broadmeadows to the more advantaged Greenvale. Within the City of Hume, the Broadmeadows SLA has significantly lower levels of educational attainment when compared to the metropolitan Melbourne Statistical Division (MSD)⁵.

⁵ HUME Local Government Area – Service Map & Background Information February 2012

Level of Educational achievement in Hume

ABS 2006 Census data demonstrates that the City has below average levels of post-compulsory educational attainment with only 8.4% of the working age population having completed a bachelor or higher degree, compared with 19.6% for the Melbourne Statistical Division (Hume City Council profile.id 2011). Overall, 35.7% of the population left school at Year 10 or below (compared with 27.9% across all Melbourne LGAs), and 37.8% went on to complete Year 12 or equivalent (compared with 48.6% for all Melbourne LGAs).

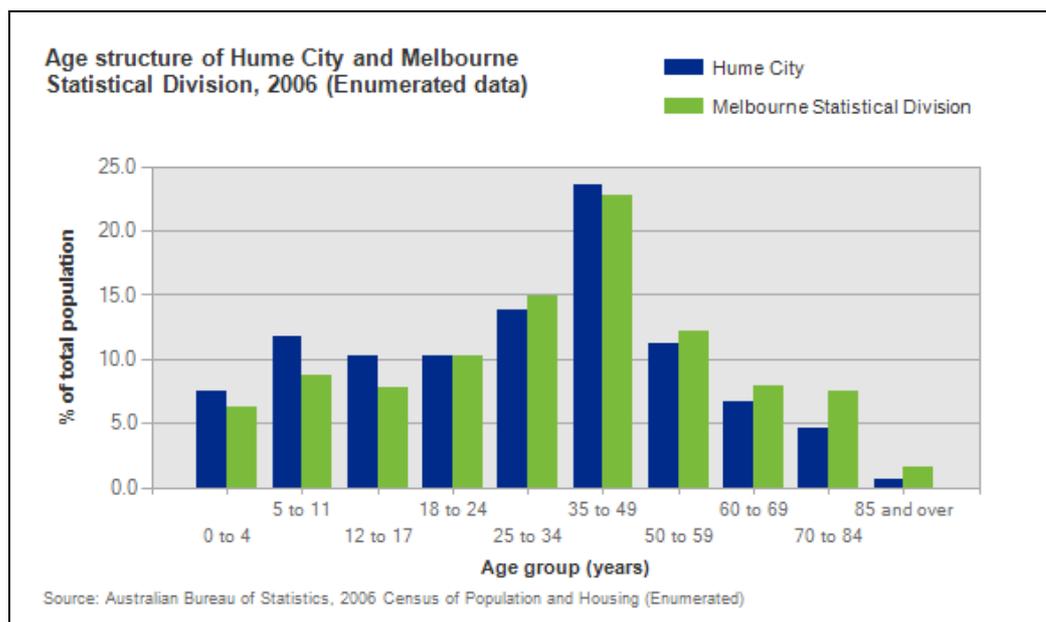
Australian Early Developmental Index

The 2009 Australian Early Developmental Index results on children in their first year of schooling indicated that Hume, in particular Broadmeadows has 41.2% of children vulnerable on one or more domains. This placed Broadmeadows as having either the highest or second highest percentage of developmentally vulnerable children in Victoria.⁶

High Youth Population

The 2012 HWLLEN Environmental Scan reports that the 2012 estimated population for the City of Hume is 178,509. Of these, it is estimated that there are currently 27,432 young people aged 10-19 years, or 15.3% of the population. It is estimated that this number will rise to just under 30,000 by 2020 and just under 40,000 by 2030 (Hume City Council forecast.id 2011).

The Hume region has a higher proportion of young people in the total population compared to the average across the Melbourne Statistical District.



⁶ ibid

Table 1 : Profile of Young People in the Hume region

Estimated total population 2012		178,509
	Aged 10-14	13,611
	Aged 15-19	13,821
Indigenous population	(2006 Census)	892
Indigenous youth aged 12-17	(2006 Census)	160
Young migrants (aged 10-19) arriving in 2011	(DIAC 2012)	204
Young humanitarian migrant arrivals (aged 10-19) arriving 2011	(DIAC 2012)	129
Ranking on SEIFA Index of disadvantage (2006 Census)		4th

Sources: Hume City Council Forecast.id 2011; Hume City Council profile.id 2011; DIAC 2012

High Youth Refugee numbers

According to the most recent (2006) available ABS Census data, 29.3% (43,074) of the Hume population were born overseas, (Hume City profile.id 2011). This is the 3rd highest number of young migrants (aged 10-19) arriving in 2011 of all 31 metropolitan LGAs of Greater Melbourne. The total number of young migrants arriving in the area in 2011 was 204 in Hume.

Of these young migrant arrivals, a large proportion was of a humanitarian nature. 63% of all young migrant settlements in Hume in 2011 were humanitarian. The 129 youth humanitarian settlements in Hume in 2011 were the second highest number of young humanitarian settlements in any of the 31 LGAs across Melbourne. (DIAC 2012).

Countries of origin

The highest proportion of young people (10-24) in Hume who were born outside Australia were born in Iraq – 1382 or 3.9 % with 945 of those young people living in Broadmeadows and 436 living in Craigieburn. In addition 547 (1.6%) of young people (10-24) are from Turkey and 429 (1.2%) are from New Zealand. Most of the young people in Sunbury are born in Australia 6911 (91.0%). Overall, Hume has a higher proportion of young people born in Australia, 27,727 (79.2%), than the Melbourne Statistical Division (ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing as cited in Hume City Council, 2009).

Indigenous population

The 2012 HWLLEN Environmental Scan reported that 2006 ABS Census data showed that 30.5% (272) of the Hume Indigenous population are in the 12-24 age group (total indigenous population 892) (Hume City Council profile.id 2011).

3. Attendance at school

A key indicator of growing disengagement from school is a long term pattern of poor attendance at school. High levels of poor attendance over an extended period indicate elevated levels of risk of subsequent disengagement from school.

In order to assess the extent of potential school disengagement, data on patterns of school non-attendance in 2011 were collected from secondary schools across Hume. The data collected shows that there are significant numbers of young people between the ages of 10 and 15 in the City of Hume attending school on average less than 80% of the time, and a smaller but still sizeable group attending less than 60% of the time.

The following table indicates the total enrolment in government schools in Hume by the four year levels that cover the age range of 12 to 15 year olds. These are as follows:

Table 2: Enrolment in government schools in Hume 2011

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
Government schools	1320	1357	1290	1231

Source: DEECD Northern Regional Office unpublished data

There are 5,198 students enrolled in government schools in Years 7 to 10. Assuming that half of the Year 10 cohort will turn 16 at mid year, it is estimated that around 4582 will have been aged between 12 and 15 in 2011. (this is more than double the enrolment number of young people in the same age group reported across Moreland schools).

Data provided by government secondary schools indicates there are at least 60 young people in this age group attending school on average less than 3 days a week, and a further 205 attending less than 4 days a week. A total of over 260 young people across Hume attending government schools are missing at least one day of school on average each week.

When data from other sectors is included, the numbers increase to 68 attending less than 3 days on average and a further 215 averaging attendance less than 4 days a week.

Based on the data reported by the government schools, 4.5 % of this age group are missing an average of one day of school each week, and a further 1.3 % is missing more than 2 days of school each week on average.

**Table 3: Average 2011 school attendance less than 3 days a week (over 40% non-attendance)
Government sector**

	Aged 12 -14	Total aged under 16	English spoken at home
School A	2	6	6 out of 6
School B	3	3	Not reported
School C	1	3	Not reported
School D	Not reported	13	Not reported
School E	5	10	10 out of 10
School F	8	16	16 out of 16
School G	5	9	Not reported
Sub Total	24	60	32 out of 32

Other sectors

	Aged 12 -14	Total aged under 16	English spoken at home
School H	1	6	3 out of 6
School J	2	2	2 out of 2
Overall Total	27	68	37 out of 40

Nearly all these students are reported to have an English speaking background. The 12 to 14 age group comprise more than one third of those averaging less than three days of school.

Table 4: Average 2011 school attendance less than 4 days a week (over 20% non-attendance)

	Aged 12 -14	Total aged under 16	English spoken at home
School A	9	20	17 out of 20
School B	2	3	Not reported
School C	2	3	Not reported
School D	Not reported	29	Not reported
School E	18	19	14 out of 14 (5 not reported)
School F	45	70	69 out of 70
School G	38	61	Not reported
Sub Total	114	205	100 out of 104

Other sectors

	Aged 12 -14	Total aged under 16	English spoken at home
School H	1	2	1 out of 2
School J	8	8	2 out of 8
Overall Total	123	215	103 out of 114

The 12-14 year old age group comprise roughly half of those averaging attendance between 3 and 4 days each week. Again, they predominantly come from English speaking family backgrounds.

Expulsions

There were 26 expulsions reported by government schools in 2011. Of these, 23 of those expelled were male and 3 were female. More than half those expelled were aged 14 or under. No expulsions were reported by schools from other sectors.

Uncontactable

A further 3 students were reported as still enrolled at government schools in 2011, but were also reported as being “unable to be contacted” for a various reasons. They include two 13 year olds from the same school.

Patterns of irregular school attendance commence early in primary school years. Principals of local primary school report patterns of late arrival or non-attendance commencing from Grade 1 and continuing through the early years of school. In addition school staff at both primary and secondary schools report that some parents from middle eastern countries regularly remove their children from school during the northern hemisphere summer to return to the country of origin, establishing a pattern of intermittent attendance with associated learning issues. This occurs across both the primary and the secondary school years.

4. Disengagement from school

There are a smaller number of young people in this age group who cease attending school altogether for periods ranging from one to three years. Interviews with a sample of young people indicated that the following transitions sometimes led to young people ceasing to attend school.

- Some who had been expelled or asked to leave school, may or may not have commenced at a new school for a month or two, and then ceased to attend altogether
- Some who had transitioned from primary to secondary school, attended the secondary school for a short period and then stopped attending altogether
- Some who had families that experienced relatively high mobility through short term rental changes, and in the process ceased attending school.

This suggests that the transition involved when a young person moves between schools (either through expulsion, a request to voluntarily leave, or in the move from primary to secondary school) is a time when they have a much stronger likelihood of becoming disengaged.

Primary to secondary transition

The primary to secondary school transition represents a weak link in the transition process for vulnerable and partially disengaged young people. In some instances, students commence secondary school but have started to completely disengage within a matter of weeks or months before they form any solid relationship with staff or other students. The existing mechanisms that link these students and families in the crossover from primary to secondary are insufficient to maintain their involvement.

High mobility

The third trend (that of ceasing to attend due to mobility resulting from high rates of rental and housing instability) is particularly a factor with some families. Both peak bodies and service agencies indicate that this is a contributing factor to lengthy periods of non engagement with education, and this was confirmed through several of the interviews.

Length of disengagement

A standard period of complete disengagement for those who cease attending schools appears to be between 18 months and two years. Evidence for this is found not only in the interviews conducted with families and young people, but also in the experience of support services such as Brunswick Youth Services whose clients have typically been out of school for such periods prior to enrolling with their programs.

The Victorian Department of Human Services is a key agency with whom disengaged young people are likely to come into contact. However, DHS Victoria did not make data available to this project. Therefore only general estimates can be made of the extent of those completely disengaged from education, training and employment in Hume. Six young people aged between 10 and 15 who were interviewed for this project were completely disengaged from school for periods of up to two years.

Each of the young people interviewed for case studies in this project indicated that they personally knew anywhere between three to six other people of the same age who were also not attending school at all any more.

Contact with support services

There are a large number of completely disengaged young people aged under 16 who make their way to the available support services in Hume in comparison to the Moreland LGA. Four services reported on young people from Hume being assisted in this age group in 2011.

Table 5: Agencies reporting Hume clients under the age of 16 assisted in 2011.

	Females	Males	Total
NMIT Youth Connections	34	51	85
City of Hume Youth Services (HYART)	8	51	59
Salvation Army Reconnect Program	6	1	7
Brunswick Youth Services	11	20	31
	59	123	182

There were ten duplicate records in the data supplied through NMIT Youth Connections, Brunswick Youth Services, the Salvation Army and City of Hume Youth Services (as a result of the same young person being reported through various programs), so the eventual client total for the 10-15 age group across these services totalled 172 young people.

Age of those disengaged

The extent of school non-engagement increases as young people reach 14 and 15 years of age, but there are significant numbers of 12 and 13 year olds in Hume being assisted by agencies focussed on disengagement. There were more than thirty 13 years olds, and nine 12 year olds being assisted by these agencies. Predictably, the largest group were 15 year olds. Once students have ceased attending, they report being out of school for several years.

Table 6: Client age of actual numbers of under 16 year olds supported by Agencies

Age of client	Number
11 years or younger	4
12 years old	9
13 years old	31
14 years old	49
15 years old	79
Total	172

Not all of these 172 young people are entirely disengaged from school – but the majority are. The agencies were asked to indicate how many of the under 16 year olds from Hume they were assisting were known to be not attending school at all. They collectively indicated that 65% of the 10-15 year olds that they were assisting were ‘out of school.’

Table 7: 2011 Agency Clients under the age of 16 reported to be not attending schools

	Females	Males	Total
NMIT Youth Connections	13	19	32
City of Hume Youth Services (HYART)	7	42	49
Salvation Army Reconnect Program	2	1	3
Brunswick Youth Services	11	17	28
	33	79	112

When the 112 not attending school in 2011 are added to the 283 who were attending school less than four days a week on average across the year, there are over 390 young people identified as either partially or completely disengaged from school in Hume.

Australian Government Department of Human Services

Centrelink also provided broad data for 2011 on the 12 to 15 year old age group. However, since all Centrelink primary payments require applicant to be 16 years of age, few young people were reported as contacting Centrelink for assistance; there are some exceptional circumstances. As soon as young people turned 16 however, there were significant numbers applying for assistance through Youth Allowance (approximately 900), Disability Support Payment (approximately 60), and Low Income Cards (approximately 40).

Table 8: 2011 Hume Centrelink Clients by Age

* All data is approximations

Age of client	Number
12 years old or younger	3
13 years old	5
14 years old	5
15 years old	6
Total	19

Kangan Institute

Kangan Institute also provided data on the number of young people under 16 years of age enrolled in 2011. This data includes young people studying pre-apprenticeships, VCAL and possibly VCE programs, but does not include VET in Schools (as those young people would still be enrolled at a school) or short courses. The 1,317 students reported by Kangan Institute for 2011 were almost entirely aged 15 when they enrolled.

Table 9: 2011 Kangan Institute enrolments under the age of 16.

	Females	Males	Total
Kangan Institute*	369	948	1,317

* excludes VET in Schools and Short Course enrolments

To put this in perspective, there are more than 1,300 students who live in Hume that were enrolled in TAFE in 2011, while there were approximately 2,500 students who were enrolled in Year 9 or Year 10 in all government schools in Hume in the same period. **More than one third of all Hume 15 year olds are in TAFE.**

Department of Human Services (Victoria)

No data returns were provided from the Department of Human Services (Victoria) which includes young people in Residential Care. The lack of information available from this Department makes it difficult to determine how many more young people under 16 might be disengaged from school, as it is services such as Juvenile Justice, Child Protection and Residential Care that have a higher likelihood of being in contact with young people in this situation.

Research highlights that many children and young people who have been in out-of-home care leave formal schooling at a relatively young age, with 47 per cent of young people surveyed leaving school before the age of 16.⁷

The DHS Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment (a 2010 Partnering Agreement between the Department of Human Services, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and Independent Schools Victoria) **outlines the requirements and responsibilities of all parties to work in cooperation to improve the educational experience and outcomes of children and young people in out of-home care**

Amongst other things, this provides a framework to monitor educational engagement and achievement more closely in order to improve outcomes related to student enrolment, attendance, achievement, case planning, retention and school completion. As the Partnering Agreement notes:

“Regular attendance at school is essential if children and young people are to engage with education and actively participate in learning. It is important that children develop habits of regular attendance at an early age. Students who are regularly absent from school are at risk of missing out on fundamental aspects of their educational and social development, and disengaging from schooling”(p.13)

Key data that to establish how many young people under 16 in out of home care in Hume are disengaged from school would assist in providing a more complete picture of the extent and nature of educational disengagement.

⁷ Children in Out-of-Home Care in Victoria: Numbers in Care and Educational Outcomes Achieved, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, May 2008

5. Case Studies

Case Study 1.

“Teya” is a 15 year old female from a Turkish family background. Her large immediate and extended family is very important to her, with many cousins and relatives living close by.

She says that she never got on with teachers at the secondary college she attended. Her parents “understood” her point of view and talked to the principal and teachers about this.

Right from her first year in primary school she was only going to school on three or four days a week. She had an older sister who had stopped going to school in Year 8 and who went to live overseas with an uncle in Turkey.

“Teya” missed two periods of school herself through trips back to Turkey. The first was in Year 7 when she went with her father for two months (she feels that she did not miss too much school that time), and again in Year 9, this time for six months when she went with her mother.

“Teya” stopped going to school 4 or 5 months ago. She missed some subjects and the friends she had, but has now lost contact with those friends.

She stayed in touch with the Welfare Coordinator even after she left the school, as she had a good relationship with the Coordinator. Since she began school she has had difficulty getting along with many of the teachers. She felt that they were always ‘on her back’ even if she was a little late to school.

When she stopped going to school she mainly stayed at home, although she also did paid work at KFC on four or five nights a week (a job she had obtained through work experience at school.)

As a result of disability, her mother has a social worker who referred both “Teya” and her older sister to a Youth Worker. Through this process she was eventually referred to the Moving Forward program in Hume.

She now intends to go to TAFE. She says that she has wanted to go to TAFE since she began Year 9 when she went on a tour of TAFE, though she recognises that TAFE may be a difficult environment for her.

Case Study 2.

“Mark” left school at 15.

In Year 8 he was still going to school every day, but he had friends who began wagging school in that year. They would go to school at the beginning of the day and then disappear.

Early in 2011, after a couple of weeks when he was in Year 9 “Mark also stopped going to school. He no longer liked school and ‘just got sick of it.’ He says that he still got on okay with the teachers, but not the coordinators.

He thinks that perhaps if the school day was shorter he might have kept attending, and that being able to combine work with school would have been a good idea.

He went to work full-time with his brother painting houses which he found to be hard work. His parents were apparently happy enough with his decision, though they would have preferred him to have continued on at school. The house painting did not last for very long though. Increasingly he found himself sitting at home playing on the computer, and losing contact with friends.

He knows several other young people his age who also stopped going to school.

After approximately 6 months, he approached his school about re-enrolling. The school indicated that he could either repeat Year 9 or attend the Moving Forward program for those not attending school. He chose the latter.

He was interested in going to TAFE to do some kind of course, and rang the institute to make enquiries, but “they didn’t call back.” Now he has an interview with TAFE arranged through the Moving Forward program, and perhaps will do a VCAL program.

Case Study 3.

“Brett” is a 14 year old from a family with 6 siblings. He was attending a secondary college in Hume. Some of his older siblings also had a difficult time at school.

He was expelled from school at the age of 13.

It has now been 6 months since he was expelled and has since been diagnosed as having a ‘conduct disorder’.

After being expelled, he became involved in the Juvenile Justice system, and is currently waiting to go to court (when he may enter the child protection system given his age).

His older brother who lives at home was injured in an accident and now needs care, which “Brett’s” parents are struggling to provide this. The accident has had a major impact on everyone in the family. As a result, “Brett” has not received much attention, about the same time that he began to have significant problems at school.

After being expelled, Brett was initially referred to the Youth Connections program, but he then disengaged.

“Brett” began inviting other disengaged young people around to the family home, which other family members found intimidating.

Attempts are being made to place “Brett” into a diversion program, but this requires his original school to facilitate his enrolment in another school in order for him to be able to be placed in the program. His parents are also not prepared to enrol him as they believe he does not want to go to school. “Brett” is also resistant to the idea.

Case Studies 4, 5 & 6.

“Sam” is now 14 years old, having stopped going to school when he was 13. He has not gone to school for almost a year.

The main reasons that he stopped going to school were that he did not like most of the teachers and also found the work was “too hard”. Since he stopped going to school. “Sam” spends most of the time either watching daytime television or “playing at the shops”. In the year that he has not been at school he has only attended the HYART program for a period of time, but is no longer attending this service either.

He says that he personally knows another four or five young people his age who are also not going to school.

The main thing that he misses about school is the friends that he knew there, but there is no particular change that he thinks would help him get back into education at this stage.

“Jack” is now 15 and ceased attending school about 9 months ago when he was 14 years old. The main reason that he stopped going to school was the “bad influence of a friend” who convinced him not to go.

“Jack” knows a few other young people of the same age who are also not going to school.

His family were not at all happy about him dropping out of school. The main activity he was involved in during the period of not attending school was going to his local church.

“Jack” has since enrolled at Kangan TAFE, as a result of the support and advice of his mother and family members as well as the youth counsellor in the HYART program.

“Tom” stopped going to school when he was 13, and has now been out of education for a year. He says that he “hated school”.

He personally knows three other young people his age who are not attending school. The only aspect of school that he misses are his friends who are still attending

Travel was one factor that also influenced his lack of engagement with school. If he could go to a school that was closer, that might help a bit.

6. Factors contributing to disengagement

There is a combination of factors that contribute to school disengagement among younger students: some are to do with the personal circumstances and skills of the individual, more often to do with their family context, and also the nature of the school system in which they find themselves.

In 2008 a literature review investigated the disengagement of young people from secondary education in the northern region and identified the support and pathways necessary for young people to succeed in school (Drummond 2008).

Drummond noted that there are many reasons that young people become disengaged and that the key school years between Year 5 and Year 9 is when students need to experience success in their studies, be challenged and engaged in things that are of interest to them. The literature review identified a number of factors that contributed to disengagement and include:

- Negative feelings about the value of their continued involvement in schooling
- Lack of parental support
- An under-valuing by parents, teachers and community of vocations that are not academic
- Lack of awareness of all education and work options and pathways
- Lack of engagement with the community
- Poor literacy and numeracy skills at the time of transition to secondary school
- Experience of failure with study, which causes a lack of future motivation.

Interviews with local youth service and support providers and with school staff identified a series of factors particularly prevalent in their experience in Hume.

Students with Additional Learning Needs

One important contributing factor to school disengagement is the high level of learning disability among students that mainstream schools are unable to effectively deal with. Testing of young people provides results that frequently score just over the cut off point on eligibility for special school education. (For example young people demonstrating autism related disorders such as Aspergers which result in challenging behaviour but where IQ levels may be above the level required to access services at special schools).

Student Performance

There are concerns among staff in some youth services and support agencies that problematic and underperforming students are being 'exited' from some secondary schools in Hume. Often they achieve little success in class, they do not qualify for additional funding support, and the school therefore has limited capacity to provide the assistance they require. There are anecdotal reports that up to 40 students in this category were asked to leave one school alone in 2011. When students are asked to leave there is no requirement for the school to then assist the student and family find a new place in another school. According to at least two local secondary schools, students with a borderline intellectual disability are the biggest group of students likely to disengage.

Mental health issues

Higher rates of poor mental health are reported among young people in the Hume region. A Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) study (Bond, Thomas et al. 2000) showed that risk factors as associated with poor mental health were overrepresented in the Interface municipalities. (Access Economics (2008)). In particular, depressive symptoms were generally

higher in youths living on the fringe compared to youths living in other local council areas in Melbourne.

Family poverty and dysfunction

Family poverty and dysfunction are reported as key contributors to educational disengagement both by school staff and by Family Services teams. Parents in some cases lack control over their children. In other instances the absence of a regular household routine based around school and work makes it extremely difficult for young people to make it to school on any regular basis.

An additional factor is the number of parents who have themselves previously had unsuccessful and unsatisfactory experiences with their own schooling, who as a result find it difficult to relate to and engage with schools, and place less importance on their children's regular school attendance and engagement. Families who are themselves not well connected don't tend to see education as an important option.

Acting as family carers

Some young people are encouraged to remain at home to act as carers for family members, sometimes when parents have issues with drug or alcohol addiction, but in other cases due to the psychological dependency of the parent on the child.

Young people who are in Care

An "at risk" group are young people who are in Care. While this group are particularly at risk of disengaging before the age of 16, the impact of partnering arrangements between schools and DHS case managers on patterns of school attendance continues to be difficult to obtain.

On-line bullying

A developing trend causing increased rates of non-attendance is the occurrence of on-line bullying between students. Both school staff and workers in some agencies noted this as an increasing cause and was leading otherwise academically capable students to refuse to attend school for periods of varying duration.

7. What would help young people re-engage?

Recent national and international research on models of effective re-engagement for disengaged learners has identified four key requirements that are also applicable to assisting young people under the age of 16.⁸

- **Find some way of connecting** with disengaged young people who may be socially marginalised in order to identify their needs and inform them of available options. This variously involves providing easily accessible information, bringing learning to the learner, targeting high needs groups, and establishing lasting meaningful relationships.
- **Addressing their welfare needs** is crucial for any successful intervention. Successful interventions recognise that they are often dealing with young people who have a variety of obstacles that affect their capacity to participate in learning. Intensive support through guidance, counselling, monitoring and follow-up, taking a client sensitive approach to well-being, developing beneficial relationships within the community, delivering services within a hub, and providing whole community or familial intervention are five essential strategies in addressing learner needs associated with well-being.
- **An appropriate approach to learning** that takes account of young people's previous negative experiences of learning, failure at school, and avoidance of formal teaching and learning. Disengaged learners require acknowledgment of their learning interests and building upon their pre-existing knowledge and skills. Four core strategies identified for effective programs are: making learning applied or hands on, providing flexible learning options, addressing literacy and numeracy skill development needs and offering programs that integrate technologies.
- **Creating and presenting relevant pathways** for learners that provide links to other study and to work and career development opportunities.

What young people are saying?

Within this project, young disengaged people were asked what would have helped them remain at school or made returning more viable. Their responses echoed some of the themes identified in the research:

Supportive relationships with staff

The benefit of having a supportive relationship with staff involved in the re-engagement process is important to young people. This reflects a need to feel connected to one or more people involved in the re-engagement process and is more viable in small scale programs. It is usually in contrast to their previous educational experience where relationships were not seen to have been sufficiently supportive.

More practical applied options earlier in the school curriculum

A strong theme in the opinions of those we interviewed was an interest in applied learning that was not available to them in Years 7 to 9. The curriculum available to them seemed boring and appeared to them to emphasise what they could not do rather than what they could. This was particularly the case if they found the required levels of reading and numeracy challenging. A

⁸ Davies M, Lamb S, and Doecke E, Strategic Review of Effective Re-engagement models for Disengaged Learners, University of Melbourne 2011 p6

curriculum that provided diverse applied 'hands on' learning opportunities was attractive to many of those interviewed, and was a factor in the strong interest in enrolling in various VCAL options once they were old enough to do so.

Opportunities to combine part-time school with other activity

The flexibility of blending part-time school with other community engagement and support activities would assist some young people teetering on the edge of disengagement. Some find it difficult to cope with full-time school, and start to absent themselves rather than having a structured opportunity to combine with other activity that might also be usefully developing skills. Part-time schooling is already an option with the approval of the DEECD Regional Office and the take-up of part-time options combined with other appropriate programs could and should be encouraged.

Building on the value of peer relationships

Some school staff report that a percentage of their younger students who leave school subsequently return after one or two terms as they miss their friends. Several of the disengaged young people interviewed for case studies reported that the main thing they missed about school if they left were their school friends. Greater use might be made of these relationships in pro-actively encouraging students to return to school.

8. Services to support young people in Hume

Alternative Education Programs

Young people who are marginally engaged at school, or who have become disengaged need access to alternative options for learning to the mainstream secondary schools. The large mainstream secondary schools are limited in their capacity to respond to the particular needs of these students. Teaching and learning environments that are most likely to be able to help these students re-engage are relatively small in scale (compared to normal secondary schools), have the capacity to develop learning programs that meet the needs of the individual, and provide significant social and emotional support in conjunction with the curriculum.

Research and practice has identified the following approaches to teaching to be essential elements for re-engagement.

- Making learning less formal
- Providing flexible options
- Addressing literacy and numeracy skill development needs
- Making learning applied or hands-on

Meet welfare needs

Identifying and acting upon the welfare needs of disengaged young people are also required for any successful intervention. Best practice delivery interventions recognise that they are dealing with people who have a variety of obstacles that affect their ability to learn. The factors that impact on their wellbeing are complex including mental-health, drug and alcohol issues, family violence, and no history of people working in the family.

Provide holistic approach

Many programs adopt a holistic approach that simultaneously develops supports for addressing personal wellbeing needs while helping the young person access the learning program appropriate to their needs.⁹ A holistic approach developing a range of partnerships within a program can assist in meeting the needs of disengaged learners.

Provide sustained approach

The other element required is a sustained approach. If young people have been disengaged from education for several years, then short term 10 or 12 week programs are unlikely to be sufficient to provide a longer term re-engagement option.

There are limited alternative education options available to young people under 16 in Hume that combine these elements. The options that have been identified are as follows:

Teaching Units

Teaching Units at Coburg, Heidelberg and Brunswick West provide short term interventions in an attempt to re-engage the students over a term before transitioning them back into regular secondary schools. The Teaching Units offer temporary intensive assistance (12 weeks) for students experiencing learning, social or emotional difficulties at school. Teaching Units aim to re-integrate students back into their schools after their period of placement in the intensive Teaching Unit. The Units typically provide intensive language, literacy, numeracy and social programs. Students are accepted from all

⁹ Davies M, Lamb S, and Doecke E, Strategic Review of Effective Re-engagement models for Disengaged Learners, University of Melbourne 2011

secondary schools. Students attend four days a week, and on the other day attend their original school to maintain contact and establish a re-integration plan.

The Island

The Island is located in Coburg and is a small 'hands on' educational provider that offers work preparation education and training programs for 15-18 year olds through VCAL options at Foundation and Intermediate level. In August 2011 the Island had 21 enrolments. Analysis of their 2011 enrolments found only four students under the age of 16 came from Hume. The majority of their enrolments either come from western region LGAs or are aged over 16. The Island is currently operating at only half the capacity of 40 students and represents an under utilised resource. There are opportunities to better utilise the Island, but in its current configuration as a vocational program, care would need to be taken to ensure that the greater use is accompanied by appropriate intake and student support programs.

The Pavillion

The Pavillion School is not located in Hume, but operates in adjacent LGAs, with campuses in Preston and Mill Park providing for young people aged 14 to 20 years old. The Pavilion started with 20 students in 2009, and has since expanded to 150 students across the two campuses. Its aim is to re-engage students who have been outside of any education and training for a minimum of 3 months by creating a positive relationship with the student as a basis for change.

The school is designed as a transition and/or re-integration centre for young people who access educational support tailored to individual needs in small classes of 6 to 12 people. Social work support is provided to each student and can include counselling, advice and referral if required. Learning is based on the Victorian Essential Learning Standards and the VCAL.

The Pavilion offers the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) program within a targeted curriculum that tackles individual learning deficiencies over a shortened-time period, while meeting the requirements of the certification. The school staff have extensive experience in both social work and education. Each student's initial contact point is with the school counsellor, who instigates one-on-one therapeutic sessions to talk to students and their families, to identify the support structures they need to have put in place to re-commence their studies and start at the school.

They have approximately 160 students enrolled, but report that "*relatively few come from Hume*" with most referrals from schools and other agencies in either Whittlesea or Darebin.

Brunswick Youth Services

Brunswick Youth Services provides broad-based supports for young people aged 13-19 and a range of personal development, training and educational opportunities that are designed to create pathways back into education for young people. Brunswick Youth Services operates a small bus transport service that collects participants from Hume and transports them to the Brunswick base where the programs are delivered.

- The service has a program for 13-16 year olds on 3 days a week which offers case management support while participants engage in creative art, media, group work, accredited training and adventure activities. The focus is on preparation to re-engage with mainstream schooling, or other forms of further education.

- In partnership with NMIT they also provide a TAFE program which offers the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) for 15-20 year old 'at risk' young people who require extra assistance to restart their education.
- **Youth Media Training studio Brunswick (funded by Youthworx)**. This program delivered by Brunswick Youth Services offers an 'access' component where young people can engage in media training activities or short projects without a further longer-term commitment. A more structured accredited training program is provided at Certificate I, II, and III levels in Creative Industries. The Mirror Program is a youth centred, digital media training and lifeskills program for young people who are in contact with the justice system. The Mirror Program aims to support young people to think about their situation through the process of making a short film.

Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre

Glenroy Neighbourhood learning Centre offers a Foundation Level community VCAL at both Glenroy and at Banksia Gardens. The VCAL program is designed to suit young people who have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from mainstream education, but only accepts enrolments from students aged 15 years and 11 months. The main focus is on 16-19 year olds

This is the only Community VCAL program running in the Hume region.

Kangan Institute (Centre for Youth)

The Centre for Youth at Kangan Institute provides both VCAL and VCE programs for early school leavers, as well as pre-apprenticeships and other VET Certificate courses.

Analysis of Education Programs to support re-engagement

It is apparent from this listing of education re-engagement programs in Hume that there are very few options for those aged under 16. At 15 there are at least some options (e.g. The Island, the Pavillion), but for anyone under 15 there are almost none.

Teaching Units offer only short assistance for a term; and then students have to return to their mainstream school and the same environment which they previously found problematic.

Location of options

The location of educational services is also an issue. The Pavillion school provides an option for those aged 14 and above, but the location of the campuses in Preston and Mill Park results in most of their enrolments coming from young people who are not resident in Hume.

As a result, the pattern that appears to develop for young people who become disengaged from school in Years 7, 8 and 9 is a "waiting game". If they decide that they do not want to attend one of the mainstream secondary schools, they wait out the period of one, two or three years until they are eligible for less-formal, flexible and applied learning programs (such as VCAL) at the age of 15 or 16.

In the meantime, they are largely invisible to both education and other support systems.

Other Services supporting re-engagement for those under 16

There are a variety of youth services that address particular barriers to educational and community engagement such as mental health services, disability services, and services for the homeless that can be accessed in the region. However, in this section we have confined the analysis to those services that have some focus on engagement and re-engagement with education and training.

Youth Connections

The main initiative established to support young people in the younger age group is the Commonwealth funded Youth Connections program that provides support for 13-19 year olds who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging.

Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE is the lead agent for the Hume Whittlesea Youth Connections consortia, and many of the main agencies in the LGA that provide youth services are also members of the consortia. These services are provided by Dianella Community Health; Kangan Institute; Mission Australia; The Salvation Army; and Youth Projects.

Moving Forward

Moving Forward is a 10 week motivational program for the 14-18 year old age group in Hume offered through Hume Council Youth Services. Participants attend 2 days a week, with numbers limited to 10 participants at a time. The program content is focussed on strengthening life skills, developing work readiness skills, clarifying career pathways and building self confidence and self esteem. (The program emphasis may be progressively shifting to focus on those aged over 16 due to the lack of options for 14 and 15 year olds at the end of the 10 week process)

FrontBurner Re-engagement Project

Frontburner provides a cooking and hospitality program targeted at 14-18 year olds (though the clientele is predominantly aged 15 and above). 75% of the participants are still enrolled at school. The program is conducted at Kangan TAFE and consists of 10 sessions each of 3 hours duration conducted in a café environment. The program provides basic skills in hospitality, including barista skills. The intake is ten participants per term, or 40 each year.

HYART

HYART operated as a voluntary support service for 10-17 year olds who had contact with Victoria Police and were considered to be at risk. Designed as an early intervention crime prevention and referral program before young people entered the juvenile justice system, encouraging disengaged young people to return to school was one of a number of outcomes pursued by program staff. HYART has been a gateway service that links to other programs and support systems, and many of their 2011 participants were 13 and 14 year olds. (Early in 2012 HYART was redesigned as a Youth Counselling Service in the City of Hume).

The Age Library in Hume

The Age Library in Hume offers a "Finding my place" program that aims to motivate students to remain in education through providing intensive career guidance and opportunities to explore careers in art, music, sport and fitness, and makeup.

The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army provides the Reconnect Program including individual and family case management, counselling, mediation and conflict resolution case work with young people aged 12-18 and their families at risk of homelessness. The Salvation Army is also a Youth Connections partner.

Analysis of Support Programs for those under 16 year olds

There are a variety of organisations that provide youth counselling, and more that provide support to young people in a family context. Several support services have a specific focus on refugees and new arrivals.

Hume City Council Youth Services provides Drop In centre services, music and arts programs, leadership activities, sports programs and separate support activities specifically designed for either boys or for girls. These are delivered in Broadmeadows, in Craigieburn, Meadow Heights, Sunbury and Roxburgh Park.

There are some short term re-engagement options such as Moving Forward and FrontBurner.

However, only a couple of the services actively address re-engagement in education as a standalone activity (for example, Brunswick Youth Services). Kangan TAFE Youth Unit has recently introduced a new service called “Next Step” which attempts to attract and engage early school leavers in short term ‘holding activities’ until they can participate in an appropriate course such as VCAL or a pre-apprenticeship.

Workers coming into contact with disengaged young people and those only marginally attached to schools report that they have very few referral options for those aged under 16. Program options such as the Youth Media Training Studio in Brunswick are soon swamped by applicants as word of mouth spreads about the option. Further activities and programs need to be available to assist the re-engagement of large pool of young people that remain invisible to the service systems.

9. Summary of Findings

Many young people under the age of 16 in the City of Hume attend school on a very irregular basis. Government schools reported in excess of 200 young people in this situation.

There is a smaller and almost invisible group of young people under the age of 16 who are not attending school, few of whom interact with government or community agencies unless they get into trouble with police or come to the attention of services such as Child Protection.

Interviews with those working with local families and interviews undertaken for this project with young people suggest that there are considerable numbers not attending, especially when it is identified there are often multiple instances of young people in the one family not attending school.

Many of the under 16 year olds disengaged from school have no contact with youth agencies or other support systems. Therefore it is almost certain that the 112 reported by Hume agencies as not attending school in 2011 understates the actual extent of complete school disengagement among 10 to 15 year olds.

When re-engagement with education does occur, it is frequently the result of word of mouth peer referrals to programs such as the Youth Media Training Studio or to the Pavillion School.

One of the factors that make it extremely difficult to establish the extent of school non-attendance for this age group is that Government agencies will not release data citing privacy legislative requirements. Since data is not shared even between government agencies, the effect is to keep the extent of school disengagement hidden from public view. The focus of Government data collection on school disengagement commences at 15 years of age, when the evidence is that some young people have not been going to school for several years by that time.

Based on the available data and interviews, the majority of those disengaged from school appear to be in the 13-15 year old age group, but there are some cases in which disengagement has occurred by 11 or 12 years of age. This is consistent with Victoria Police and Juvenile Justice data that also indicates that most contact occurs from age 14, and particularly age 15.

More effective integrated tracking mechanisms from primary school and beyond would assist in more accurately quantifying how many people under 16 are not attending school.

Primary to Secondary Schools Transition

The primary to secondary transition process is a transition point at which some young people who are already marginally engaged at primary school cease regular school attendance before any significant relationships with secondary school staff have been developed. These young people can regularly be identified by their previous patterns of irregular attendance across the primary school years.

The transition involves a move to what is usually a much larger secondary school. Establishing a strong relationship with one or more key school staff members takes time and some students are gone before this occurs. In Hume the importance of re-establishing the Transition Net would help alleviate and address some of these issues.

Applied Learning Options

The lack of sustainable learning programs in Hume has been noted. There is a need for practical applied learning options available from at least the beginning of secondary school. The most frequent suggestion from currently or formerly disengaged young people that were interviewed was for more applied learning options to be provided earlier than the VCAL or pre-VCAL programs currently available.

When young people who have been disengaged for lengthy periods become eligible at 15 or 16 for enrolment in VCAL programs they often decide to return to education and training through community or TAFE programs.

These programs provide a less formal learning environment more flexible options and still work to address literacy and numeracy skill development.

The learning environment also needs to be kept to a small class size so that strong personal relations have a chance of being established between students, staff and parents. The first point of re-engagement must be small scale and capable of providing the level of intense support required for the particular individual.

The model used by the Pavillion School (integrating social work and education skills in the staffing) provides a strong basis to develop a Hume based model.

Parent and family engagement

The relationship between families and schools is a key factor that influences patterns of school attendance and engagement for younger students. Development of a pilot project with a small number of primary and secondary schools in Hume would assist the development of an appropriate model that could address some of the key welfare and outreach requirements for re-engagement identified in Section 6 of this report.

The Hume Middle Years Working Group has identified the need to develop a number of pilot projects with schools to build effective school community partnerships to support parental engagement in young people's learning. Schools need to be central to development of such a pilot, but critically need the assistance of a variety of community service agencies to assist them to create an effective and sustainable approach.

The Family – School Partnership Framework developed in 2008 by the national parent bodies in Australia – Australian Council for State School Organisations (ACSSO) and the Australian Parents Council (APC) and the Australian Government provided a model for this work.

“High levels of parental and community involvement is strongly related to improved student learning, attendance and behaviour. Family involvement can have a major impact on student learning, regardless of the social or cultural background of the family. Family involvement in schools is therefore central to high quality education and is part of the core business of schools.”

The aim of the Family-School Partnerships Framework is to encourage sustainable and effective partnerships between all members of the school community, including teachers, families and students’¹⁰

There are various models that could assist the development of more effective relationships between schools and parents.

These include:

- Building on the DEECD's extended Hub based model in Secondary School
- Hume has 10 Community Hubs located within primary schools in the City of Hume. This is a proven successful model.

Using a variety of engagement tools including, the Family-School Partnership Framework, the Hume Middle Years Working Group has identified the need to employ a Community Liaison Officer (CLO) based at a secondary school in Hume who would target Years 7 -9 and work collaboratively with students, parents and the school through a Community Hub model.

The CLO position is a school/community based approach to improve social inclusion and learning outcomes for young people and their families. This approach will enable schools to work collaboratively with community agencies to share resources and expertise to support parents and young people from Years 7 to 9. It will prompt new systemic ways of supporting and resourcing parents and young people's education and wellbeing through a Community Hub model. This model will increase opportunities for parents and young people, especially those experiencing high levels of disadvantage to engage in all aspects of community life and support educational attainment.

¹⁰ Family School Partnership Framework DEEWR 2008

Schools need strong support from community agencies to develop the processes and skills required to establish relationships with some of the families who will need to be engaged. To assist this process the HWLLEN will be conducting a series of Educational summits that will promote parent engagement at a continuum from primary to secondary school and ensure families and young people are supported in their middle years.

The educational summits will highlight the school/community based approach to improve social inclusion, learning outcomes and aspirational thinking for young people and their families. This approach will encourage schools to work collaboratively with community agencies to share resources and expertise to support parents and young people. It will prompt new systemic ways of supporting, resourcing and increasing opportunities for parents and young people, especially those experiencing high levels of intergenerational disadvantage to engage in all aspects of community life including social and workforce participation.

For Hume's local secondary schools the Community Hub model is a shift in thinking and practice to the provision of services and engagement of families in an inclusive way. Hume has high levels of youth disengagement, long term unemployed families with significantly low attainment rates at school. The continuum of relationship with parents between primary school to secondary school is critically important to successful engagement at secondary school, which has long term ramifications on student outcomes and Year 12 attainment rates.

Data Collection

As per the Moreland Under16 Report "Invisible and Ineligible"¹¹ to capture information on when and how young people cease attending school we propose development of a standard interview template that could be used by each agency that comes into contact with a young who is re-engaging with education or other programs.

The information could be periodically collated to identify patterns of disengagement and opportunities for strengthening the service system.

Repeating the process of data collection from schools on patterns of non-attendance among the under 16 age group will enable longer term trends to be monitored and help develop a focus on engagement issues for this age group.

Resolving the blocking of access to data by government agencies most likely to interact with young people who are not attending school will provide a much more complete picture as to the extent of complete school disengagement. Surveying only the community agencies with which those under 16 come into contact provides a limited insight into the full extent of disengagement.

¹¹ U/16: Invisible & Ineligible...The Moreland Under 16 Project

10. Strategies to improve engagement of those under 16.

1. The Hume City Youth Advocacy Group should be responsible for advocating for the recommendations contained in this report.
2. The capacity of mainstream schools to provide all students with flexible and responsive learning options (particularly those who are most vulnerable) should be improved.
3. Promote hub based projects (including a pilot demonstration project) with and between local schools to improve student engagement with a focus on:
 - Primary to secondary transition
 - Parent engagement in student learning using the Family-School Partnership Framework
 - Developing applied learning options for Years 7 to 9
 - Flexible learning options
4. Develop a local alternative education pathway option for the 12-15 age group that combines an education and a welfare focus, provides practical and applied education pathways, and places an emphasis on supportive relationships with students.
5. Explore models of active school re-connection for young people aged 12-15 years that both schools and other agencies jointly fund and deliver within the City of Hume. These might combine aspects of existing programs such as Finding My Place, Moving Forward and the case management component of Youth Connections.
6. Improve Commonwealth State and local data collection processes to enable more accurate identification of young people under the age of 16 who are not attending school.
 - Development of an agreed data collection approach with local schools and agencies in Hume;
 - Annual collection of relevant data (in terms 2 or 3), in partnership with Youth Connections and HWLLEN;
 - Promotion to Catholic and Independent schools and government agencies to participate in the annual data collection process.

References

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<http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/>

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Children in Out-of-Home Care in Victoria: Numbers in Care and Educational Outcomes Achieved, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, May 2008

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Department of Planning and Community Development, Victoria in Future 2008 Projections
http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/32233/Moreland.pdf

Engage Involve Create – Youth Statement Victorian Government, Melbourne, April 2012

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KPMG, Re-engaging Our Kids Framework for Education Provision to Children and Young People at Risk of Disengaging or Disengaged from School, DEECD 2009

Out of Home Care Education Commitment, A Partnering Agreement between Department of Human Services, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and Independent Schools Victoria, published by DEECD Melbourne August 2011

Family School Partnership Framework DEEWR 2008

U/16: Invisible & Ineligible...The Moreland Under 16 Project

Attachment 1

Hume Under 16 Project Data Collection

The “Hume Under 16 Project” is attempting to identify as precisely as possible the number of young people aged between 10-15 years who are disengaged from education and training in the City of Hume. We are sending you this data request on the basis that your organisation has some contact with young people in this age range who may be disengaged from school, or are at serious risk of disengagement.

The project is being managed by the Asquith Group on behalf of the Hume Whittlesea LLEN, and the NMIT Youth Connections program.

Time frame

- We are seeking data on clients assisted last year between 1st January and 30th December 2011.

Age Range

- We are seeking information on clients aged 10 to 15 years of age in 2011. (Those born between 1 February 1995 – 1 February 2001).

Residing in Hume

- We are seeking information on those living in the City of Hume (see postcodes below)
 - 3043, 3045, 3047, 3048, 3049 (inc. Tullamarine, Broadmeadows, Coolaroo, Dallas, Attwood)
 - 3059, 3061, 3062, 3063, 3064 (Campbellfield, Kalkallo, Mickleham, Roxburgh Pk, Somerton)
 - 3427, 3428, 3429, 3430 (Sunbury, Bulla, Diggers Rest, Goonawarra, Clarkefield, Konagterra)

Sufficient data is being collected to enable the project to clarify whether young people are being counted only once or multiple times when we compare data provided by other agencies and services.

Please include data on any individuals placed on program waiting lists.

We will not identify individual agency data in the report.

Please save the document as a new file, and email this file to:

asquithgroup@ozemail.com.au

by 7 March 2012.

Queries can be directed to Peter Kellock at the Asquith Group on 0412 342 637, or 9859 0342.

- Clients assisted last year between 1st January and 30th December 2011
- Who were born between 1 February 1995 – 1 February 2001
- And were living in the City of Hume

	Date of Birth	Male or Female	Postcode	Initial of Surname	Still attending school? (Yes/No)	Language spoken at home
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						
15						
16						
17						
18						
19						
20						

(If more than 20 clients have been assisted in 2011, please copy table and complete additional details)

Please save the document as a new file, and email this file to:

asquithgroup@ozemail.com.au

by 7 March 2012.

Thank You

Attachment 2

Hume Under 16 Project Data Collection

The “Hume Under 16 Project” is attempting to identify as precisely as possible the number of young people aged between 10-15 years who are disengaged from education and training in the City of Hume. We are sending you this data request on the basis that your school has some students in this age range who may have become disengaged from school, or are at serious risk of disengagement.

The project is being managed by the Asquith Group on behalf of the Hume Whittlesea LLEN and the NMIT Youth Connections program.

Time frame

- We are seeking data on students enrolled last year between 1st Jan and 30th Dec 2011.

Age Range

- We are seeking information on students aged 10 to 15 years of age in 2011. (Those born between 1 February 1995 – 1 February 2001).

Residing in Hume

- We are seeking information on those living in the City of Hume (see postcodes below)
 - 3043, 3045, 3047, 3048, 3049 (inc. Tullamarine, Broadmeadows, Coolaroo, Dallas, Attwood)
 - 3059, 3061, 3062, 3063, 3064 (Campbellfield, Kalkallo, Mickleham, Roxburgh Pk, Somerton)
 - 3427, 3428, 3429, 3430 (Sunbury, Bulla, Diggers Rest, Goonawarra, Clarkefield, Konaggerra)

Sufficient data is being collected to enable the project to clarify whether young people are being counted only once or multiple times when we compare data provided by other agencies and services.

We will not identify individual school or agency data in the report.

When the following sections have been completed please **save the document as a new file**, and email this file to:

asquithgroup@ozemail.com.au

by 13 March 2012.

Queries can be directed to Peter Kellock at the Asquith Group on 0412 342 637, or 9859 0342.

Please provide details for students aged between 10 to 15 years of age (i.e. born between 1 February 1995 – 1 February 2001).

Students aged between 10 to 15 years who average school non-attendance of more than 40% between January-December 2011.

	Date of Birth	Male or Female	Current Postcode	Initial of Surname
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				

Students aged between 10 to 15 years who average school non-attendance of between 20%-40% between January- December 2011.

	Date of Birth	Male or Female	Current Postcode	Initial of Surname
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				
17				
18				
19				
20				

Students aged 10 to 15 years who have been expelled or asked to leave school between February 2011 – December 2011.

	Date of Birth	Male or Female	Current Postcode	Initial of Surname
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				

Students aged 10 to 15 years who were still enrolled but are unable to be contacted.

	Date of Birth	Male or Female	Current Postcode	Initial of Surname
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				

When the following sections have been completed please **save the document as a new file**, and email this file to:

asquithgroup@ozemail.com.au

by 13 March 2012.

Thank You.

Attachments 3

Young people aged under 16 not going to school

- How old are you now?
- How old were you when you began to regularly not go to school? How long has it been since you last went?
- What caused you to stop going to school regularly? (Describe what happened)
- What do you do when you aren't going to school? How do you spend your time?
- Do you know many other people your age not going to school? How many?
- What programs or services have you gone to since you stopped going to school?
- Where and how do you get information about what options and services are available to you?
- What would help you go back to school or to somewhere else to learn useful skills?
- If you have returned to school or training, what helped get you started again?
(skip to the next question if you haven't gone back)
- Is there anything that you miss about school?
- Does not going to school have any effect on you (or on your family)?