



C O N S U L T I N G

An Evaluation of the

Community Service Program Pilot

Esperance Senior High School

Esperance Senior High School has a population of students who come from a mix of town and farming communities. The town of Esperance is characterised by its physical remoteness and perceived sense of isolation. It lies in the south-east of Western Australia, some 720kms from Perth. Esperance Senior High School comprises the Senior School (years 10, 11 and 12) and a Junior Campus for years 8 and 9. In Upper School, students can undertake a TEE course, a non-TEE course or a Vocational Education and Training course in industry studies (including automotive and construction), agriculture, business, hospitality or childcare. The school has a strong emphasis on academic, sporting, cultural and social activities.

(<http://www2.eddept.wa.edu.au/schoolprofile>)

Demographic Profile

- Student population: 980
- Aboriginal student population: 64
- Approximate university bound students: 33%
- Approximate TAFE bound students: 33%
- VET/Employment bound students: 33%
- Approximately 47% of families are health care card recipients
- Administrative Staff: 13 FTE
- Teaching Staff: 74 FTE
- School Support Staff: 27.7 FTE

Additional information:

- The Esperance Residential College accommodates over 90 students from the surrounding country areas

- The school has an outlying farm of 800 hectares, 35kms from the town, which produces grain, sheep and cattle on a commercial basis.
- A Year 10 Pre-Vocational Rural Skills program and Years 11 and 12 Primary Industry Studies VET courses currently accommodate 30 students in agriculture.
- The Esperance Community Education Campus (ECEC) is a further dimension of the school, representing a federation of the High School, Curtin University, the Education Support Centre, the Esperance Residential College and the local community.
- The ECEC gives students the opportunity to undertake post-compulsory studies, VET studies and further education courses here in Esperance, without having to migrate to Perth.
- A number of special programs exist for varying groups of students, including Talented and Gifted (TAGs) programs, the Salmon program for students at risk, and special Commonwealth Literacy and Numeracy classes for mathematics and English intensive tutoring.

Approach to the Pilot

The initial plan for Esperance Senior High School was to engage students in the program pilot with the support of the school chaplain. The chaplain had been at the schools for 12 years and in that time had forged significant links with the community. Unfortunately, the chaplain retired before the start of the year and the responsibility for implementing the pilot fell to the new chaplain. As this individual was new to Esperance, the community links had to be rebuilt and this, among other challenges of the new position, meant that ultimately the responsibility for the pilot was shifted to the Year 10 coordinator for 2007.

Planning and Implementation

Although there were significant staffing changes in relation to the pilot program, the Esperance approach was undertaken as follows:

- Current Year 10 students were invited to voluntarily take part in the pilot.
- They were informed about the pilot in S & E classes
- Of the students who took the log book, about 6 returned it by the end of the year.

Partnerships and service activities

As the pilot program faced a number of challenges and changes, it never really got off the ground in a substantive way. Although this meant that no real links were formed with community organisations, the school has reported that the local Volunteer Resource Centre was very accommodating and supportive throughout the year.

Distinctive Features

The Esperance approach to the pilot was distinctive in the learning that has emerged as a result of their experiences. Specifically:

- They will be explicitly linking more with the curriculum and exploring a service-learning based approach.

Due to the challenges of making links with the community above and beyond the existing relationships, the school has decided to explore the various ways that the program will fit within the existing school curriculum – particularly in relation to Society and Environment.

- The approach will also more specifically pick up on existing opportunities and connections within the schools.

At present the school has identified opportunities to connect with the following existing initiatives and activities:

- Sponsorship and fundraising
- Peer support programs
- Helping incoming Year 8 students integrate into the school community
- Cadets programs
- Sports days.

In addition, there is in principle support from the students which should be a real strength as the students develop better relationships with the Year 10 coordinator.

Benefits

Again, as the pilot did not really get off the ground, the school anticipates that the students and the community will benefit through engaging with the program in

2007. In particular, the school believes that a service-learning based approach will connect well with students who might normally struggle to engage, as it will be an opportunity for them to learn through different modalities.

Challenges

Within the Esperance model there were some significant challenges to the pilot process. These included:

- Change in staffing when the school chaplain retired
- Resulting loss of significant links with the community
- Lack of allocated time within the pilot requiring the new chaplain to take on the role.

An existing teacher with more of a rapport within the community may have been more suitable, but there was not an allocation of time that could have been used in that way for the pilot

- Concerns about duty of care and other issues – again resulting from the transition and lack of overall program knowledge / experience
- The Year 10 coordinator took up responsibility for the pilot late in Term 3 – enough time to begin preparing for 2007, but not enough to recover the lost time in the pilot phase.

Strategies to overcome challenges

Some of the strategies identified by Esperance that will be useful in moving forward included:

- Using a teacher with the appropriate FTE allocation
- Connecting the Community Service Program to the curriculum
- Identifying existing links to the program within activities already undertaken by the students.

Planning for 2007

At this stage there is clear planning process underway for 2007. The coordinator has been confirmed and will be the Year 10 coordinator as well. The Community Service Program coordinator has attended all PD sessions for the pilot schools

offered in the second half of the year and also attended the 2-day Community Service Program Forum as hosted by the Department. In planning for next year's program, the coordinator (and other school staff) has identified the following key elements of the program:

- Organised within school time and even within the school itself – to address issues and concerns regarding duty of care
- Identifying and building on the activities that students are already engaged in
- Making sure that the implementation begins early in the year
- Working within the Society and Environment curriculum – and using a more service-learning based approach
- Committing adequate time and resources to the program
- Raising more awareness within the students about community service and then beginning to build a culture of service in the school
- Raising the bar and expectations within the school to make the program more recognised and more valued.