



C O N S U L T I N G

An Evaluation of the

## Community Service Program Pilot

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## Mirraboooka Senior High School

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*Mirraboooka Senior High School is a multi-cultural secondary school made up of over 55 different cultures (Years 8-12). Built in 1965 and located eight kilometres from the Perth CBD, most of the current enrolment of students comes from the intake areas of Dianella, Yokine, Joondanna, Tuart Hill, Nollamara, Westminster and Balcatta. Mirraboooka SHS is committed to providing a school community with a safe, supportive, and positive environment, where students have the opportunity to achieve their potential. This commitment to quality and excellence is reflected in a curriculum that has greater emphasis on meeting individual needs. This is supplemented by a focus on the skills and values required to produce good citizens for today's society.*

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

### Demographic Profile

- Student population: 619 FTE
- Aboriginal student population: 73
- Approximately 40% of families are health care card recipients
- Administrative Staff: 13 FTE
- Teaching Staff: 65.1 FTE
- School Support Staff: 27.7 FTE

### Additional information:

- The school offers a range of facilities and specialist courses; Academic Enrichment (Years 8 & 9); Students with Special Needs (DARE/ACCESS); SES Cadets; Soccer and Golf Enrichment and ICT.
- The Senior School courses include an excellent Vocational Educational and Training Program and comprehensive TEE program where students have achieved outstanding success.

- School has established community links, particularly in support of students at educational risk – the School Volunteer Program which supports students by way of mentors and role models and School's Access to Success Program. Both programs incorporate off-campus activities and community projects.
- The Chaplain currently plays an important role in the school; organising a number of programs including:
  - the Breakfast Club
  - a Lunchtime program involving games - with basketball being run by Youth for Christ
  - 'Kodi-Ka Noongar Boodja' (May I come into your Noongar land) - a local public event that is an on-going effort to build relationships between the African, Aboriginal and broader community.

### **Approach to the Pilot**

The Mirrabooka Senior High School approach to the pilot program involved building relationships with the City of Stirling as well as a number of other local community organisations. The leadership of the school is committed to making sure that the students and the school are connected to the wider community – that the school is seen as a 'community school'. The Community Service Program Pilot was seen as a clear opportunity to achieve this vision in a meaningful way. As such the approach to the pilot was intended to: ensure that the school is playing a part in the community; build relationships with existing agencies; make sure that students are visible within the community; and foster contact between students and people within the community.

The school dedicated 0.2 FTE for the Coordinator's role, were able to commit ½ day per week of the Chaplain's time in support of the Coordinator and also provided clerical support through the front office staff.

### **Planning and Implementation**

The planning and implementation of the Mirrabooka approach was undertaken as follows:

- Dedicated Term 1 to planning and preparation

- Initial planning meeting between Coordinator, Principal, Chaplain and representatives from DET and Y-Volunteer
  - Made decision to choose 'Option 2' – school organised activities
- Began developing relationships with appropriate local organisations
- Developed and delivered PowerPoint presentation to students by way of introducing the program
- Briefed staff
- Conducted an audit of current / desirable community service activities among students
- Developed a risk management plan
- Communicated with parents
- Undertook implementation of program in Term 2
  - Engaged 40 students in activities for approximately 10 weeks at 1-2 hours per week
  - Some placements were with local community organisations and other appropriate activities
  - Also connected with the City of Stirling to undertake activities in support of the community service work of the City
- Reviewed the program at the start of Term 3
  - Spent time conducting internal review and reflection on experiences
  - Gathered feedback from community partners
    - Engaged in discussion with the City of Stirling and the City also authored its own internal report in preparation for continuing the program in Term 3
    - Chaplain contacted other agencies for feedback as well
  - Made adjustments to the program as required
  - Began thinking and planning for 2007

- Continued implementation with next round of 40 students in Term 3
- Finished implementation in Term 4 with last group of 40 students.

### Partnerships and service activities

The partnerships developed and service activities organised for the Mirrabooka pilot included:

- City of Stirling – volunteering in city-supported after school care; day centres; volunteer transport; community centres and recreation centres
- Maurice Zeffert – aged care facility
- Bennett Brook – Whiteman Park based environmental project
- Sir David Brand Centre
- Volunteer Task Force – undertook garden make-overs
- Endeavour House (Brightwater) – work with young people with brain injuries
- School volunteer program:
  - First Click – in school computer training for senior citizens
  - Red Shield Appeal.

In addition, Mirrabooka Senior High School has also built partnerships for the future of the Community Service Program which will include providing volunteers for the Osborne Park Agricultural Show and the National Surf Life Saving competition.

### Distinctive Contextual Factors

The Mirrabooka pilot was distinctive in a number of ways including the:

- Effective use of resources provided by DET and Y-Volunteer

Mirrabooka was one of the only schools in the pilot that took full advantage of the support provided by DET and particularly by Y-Volunteer. It would seem that the early planning session helped the Mirrabooka staff develop a very clear plan for the program as well as a strategy for 'selling' the pilot and the program both to students and other school staff.

- Strong leadership and commitment of the school to the pilot

The leadership of the school clearly placed a significant level of priority on the Community Service Program Pilot and as a result has a cohesive, well grounded and well thought out approach to the program. There is clearly a vision for how and why this program fits with the culture of the school and there is a definite priority being placed on it for the future. In particular, the leadership of the school has a genuine desire to create change and to push their students to be part of the community. Having a vision and a commitment to making it work has been critical to Mirrabooka then implementing the design selected.

- Links with the City of Stirling

Mirrabooka took full advantage of its links with the City of Stirling both in creating placements and opportunities for students and in engaging in an effective evaluation of the program as they worked through developing their model and approach. Much like Merredin, building the links with the local council has placed Mirrabooka in an excellent position moving into the implementation phase in 2007.

- Creation of on-going partnerships

Many of the community links cultivated by the school will continue into the future. In this way, the Mirrabooka approach has really been about creating partnerships with the wider community and not just about finding placements for its students.

- Coordinator with strong existing connections with the community

The pilot program coordinator had very strong existing links with the community – and serves on the City Council. Existing connections with the community as well as an understanding of community needs have contributed to the strength of the Mirrabooka model.

- Commitment to engaging in reflective practice.

One of the truly unique aspects of the Mirrabooka approach to the pilot program was the school's commitment to reflective practice. Much of the literature which focuses on community service within a school setting highlights the importance of reflection not just at the student level, but at a programmatic level as well. Engaging in on-going evaluation and assessment of the pilot has placed Mirrabooka exceptionally well, not just for ensuring that the pilot achieved their objectives, but also in positioning the school for full implementation of the program in 2007.

- Engaging in a social activity with a number of partners

Community partners were invited to share in a group dinner with coordinators and other community organisations. This worked towards

building trust, understanding and respect between all of the partners and the school.

### Benefits

The benefits in the Mirrabooka model are most apparent in:

- The development of students as connected citizens of their community.
  - A clear focus of the Mirrabooka approach was to ensure that students are connected to their community. Having this as a clear goal and then working to achieve it has challenged the students to be participating members of their community.
  - They have learned to assist others when there is a need.
  - Students have also built up some solid life-experiences through which they are maturing and growing.
- The positive impact on the school community
  - Helps to create a positive image for the school
  - Young people are seen in a different light by members of the community – more positive, less threatening
- Helps to create connections with the community
  - Links with community organisations for the future implementation of the Community Service Program
  - Strengthens community perceptions of the school
  - Assists in the development and improvement of community spirit.

### Challenges

Within the Mirrabooka approach there were some significant challenges to overcome. These included:

- Development of relationships with community organisations
  - This was undertaken with a view to building long-term partnerships – an activity which takes time and requires relationship building skills

- Transportation of students to and from community organisations
- Addressing student expectations / placing students in experiences that are not suitable (for any number of reasons)
- Managing risk / addressing legal liability
- Administrative workload
  - Case management approach to placing, monitoring and signing off on each student
  - Appropriate time allocation / administrative support
  - Record keeping
  - Contact – with parents, students and the wider community.
- Building and sustaining a culture of student leadership / ownership
- Timing of activities in relation to finding a balance between the school timetable and the needs of the community organisations
  - Timetabling community service for 12 – 2 each Tuesday isn't of much use if community organisations need students in the morning on Monday and Wednesday.

### Strategies to overcome challenges

Some of the strategies identified by Mirrabooka included:

- Regular and consistent contact with community organisations / service providers
- Providing transport through the use of school resources (vehicles, staff time, etc.)
- Being flexible with timetabling and valuing the Community Service Program so that it is contributing to the overall learning experience not detracting from it
- Addressing student expectations from the outset and engaging in gathering regular feedback from them and from the community organisations.

### Planning for 2007

At this stage, planning for 2007 is focussing on ensuring that the program does become an important part of the culture of the school. The leadership team will use a planning and implementation process similar to the one trialed during the pilot to ensure that there is buy-in and support from students and staff. There is also recognition that not all local agencies are suitable partners for the Community Service Program – as in some cases the aims of the Program may not match well with aims and functions of individual organisations. Specific planning for 2007 includes:

- Creating flexibility within the timetable to accommodate the needs of the community
- Linking the program with an educational framework when possible – specifically to Society and Environment
- Developing an MOU with each partner organisation
- Regular promotion of the Community Service Program in the school magazine.