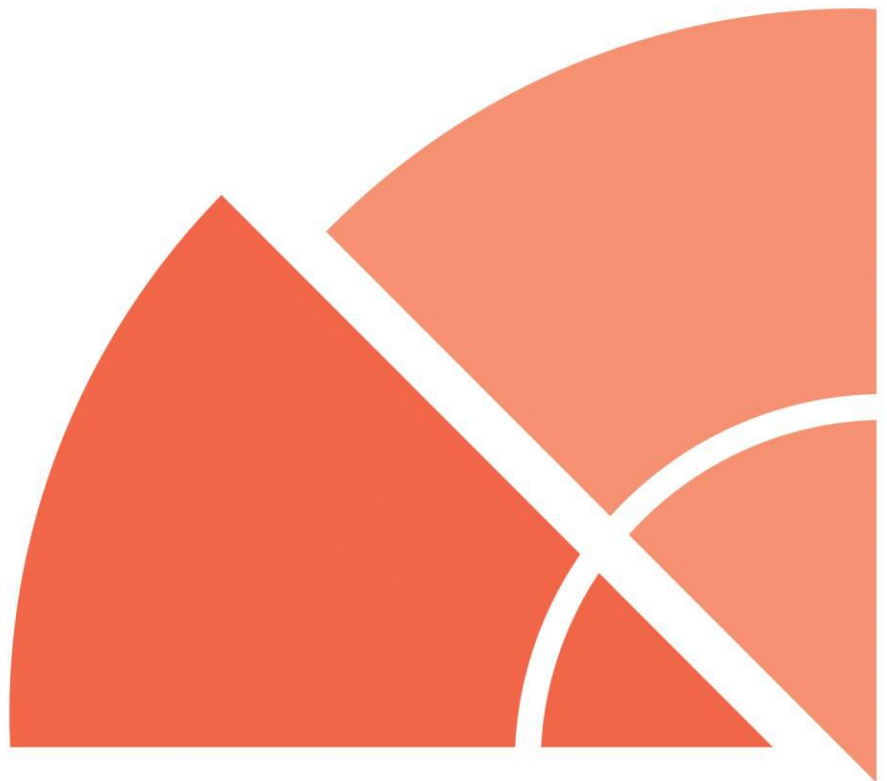


Evaluation of Pilot Transition Support Project

HVRF Final Report based on
stakeholder interviews and follow up
case study interviews

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Executive summary

This report presents the results of the final evaluation of the Transition Support Pilot, an initiative commenced within schools in the second half of 2012. The Transition Support Project ('the Project') is a joint approach between Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC) and the Education Authorities, including NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC), Catholic Education Commission (CEC) and Australian Independent Schools (AIS) to develop improved transition supports for students with a disability in mainstream education settings.

The evaluation took place in November and December 2013 and was conducted using semi-structured qualitative interviews with a diverse group of key stakeholders, as well as case studies of participating students and their parents. It follows an Interim evaluation conducted in November 2012.

The overall conclusions of the report are that the Pilot has been successful in rolling out supports for students in 2013. The supports have significant potential to enhance students' lives through better transition planning. Early indications of improvements in students' transition planning, goal setting, attitudes and motivation suggest resources expended in delivering the Pilot and any subsequent project may be 'clawed back' through savings in other parts of the school system and later, in reduced social welfare commitments.

Evidence collated during the evaluation process suggested that the Pilot provided valuable support, information and experience to students with disabilities at a critical juncture in their lives. The supports delivered within the Pilot effectively linked students to employers, industry and community networks which students would not have been exposed to in the standard educational curriculum or within school grounds. The individualised, practical life skills focus of the project was considered to be a further key point of difference. These skills were considered central to future success in further education and mainstream employment for students with disabilities and special needs.

- ❖ **Vocational Pathways:** School staff and support workers unanimously reported the excellent work the Pilot had done in establishing vocational pathways for students, both through work experience placements and engaging students in appropriate vocational education and training. For some participants work experience had resulted in part-time employment. Work experience was identified as the most beneficial element of the model because it helped participants trial new options and increased confidence, interpersonal skills and 'work readiness'. The level of support provided by youthconnections.com.au (YC) workers to participants was commended and distinguished it from work experience opportunities already existing within schools. youthconnections.com.au existing youth services delivered benefits to the Transition Support project stemming from the organisation's foothold in employment, community and educational sectors.
- ❖ **Transition Planning:** Interviewees reported that the Pilot had helped to highlight the importance of support and planning being provided to students well before the final year of high school. In many instances this planning was already taking place in schools, but the dedicated resources provided by the Pilot had allowed students to better articulate their goals and develop practical actions to achieve them. Transition plans were in place for all students at the end of 2013. Interviewees identified that students were able to speak with greater clarity about their educational and career goals.

- ❖ **Educational Performance and Learning:** The Pilot through group and one-on-one mentoring sessions had worked to improve the study habits and organizational skills of many students. The Pilot had also developed skills related to independence and functional living (skills such as travel and life skills).
- ❖ **Improved motivation, self-esteem and self-reliance:** Significant benefits were identified for participants in the area of improved attitudes and behaviours related to improved social skills, self-esteem, motivation and confidence. There are early indications that many participating students are on a more independent trajectory as a result of participating in the program.
- ❖ **School attendance:** The Pilot was deemed to have a small role to play in improving school attendance.

While the 2012 Interim evaluation had highlighted considerable resource, time and logistical issues which made the initial roll-out challenging for many of the involved parties, in 2013 many of these initial hurdles had been overcome, including an expansion of worker hours and improved communication between schools and Pilot support workers.

The final evaluation of the Pilot also provided some useful learnings, highlighting the importance of a number of factors in the success of the Transition Support project:

- ❖ Establishing good communication and relationship building between participating schools and the program;
- ❖ Minimising staff turnover – the effectiveness of the Pilot was hampered by staff turnover in one of the support worker positions;
- ❖ Clarifying school protocols and approvals for taking students off school grounds – the issue of students leaving school grounds without a teacher present remained unresolved at a number of schools hampering a number of students full participation in the Pilot;
- ❖ Improving parental engagement and parental attitudes – parental attitudes were seen as a key factor in students capacity to engage with and benefit from the supports delivered within the Pilot, and
- ❖ Effective functioning of governance mechanisms – the effective operational of governance mechanisms e.g. Working Party provided support for the project at the strategic level, helping to iron out operational difficulties on the ground, improving staff productivity.

Such issues are discussed in detail within this report.

More generally, this report concludes that the desired project outcomes able to be reported against as part of this evaluation were being achieved, as detailed in Section 4. These were:

- Development of a best practice transition framework to support personalised learning and planning support for students with a disability;
- Students transition plans are a reflection of their aspirations and abilities and include practical actions;
- Effective transition planning is embedded into the secondary school planning processes for students with disabilities, and
- Increased capacity of schools to support students with disabilities concerning transition decision-making and learning.

These findings are discussed in Section 4 and the conclusions Chapter of this report. They build upon the content in previous sections, based on key informant interviews regarding program achievements in 2013.