

MindMatters Plus: INFO SHEET NO.9

STEPPING INTO THE FUTURE: SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN THE
TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO BEYOND – A CASE STUDY

Use: Building Student
Capacity

Audience: Executive
Team and Student Support
Services Teachers

Intent: Promotion or
Intervention Strategy

St Mary's College, Dalby, QLD

INTRODUCTION

The Transitions Expo held in 2005, was designed to respond to the challenge of extending support to students as they leave school and enter the wider world. In order to do this, partnerships with community agencies, health and educational services were drawn upon, as advocated by the World Health Organisation's Health Promoting Schools Framework, (WHO, 1994 in 2006, www.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters/).

"All young people are connected with educational institutions and therefore schools and other education providers should take a leading role in any systematic and comprehensive approach to assisting young people in managing transition process" (MCEETYA, 2004).

Adolescence can be a time of confusion for many young people (Zunker, 1998) and leaving school can be a major stressor impacting upon students' wellbeing (Gall, Evans & Bellerose, 2000). By equipping young people with coping and interpersonal skills they may be able to maintain a sense of worth and self-esteem as they face these points of transition (Gall, Evans, & Bellerose, 2000).

Within secondary schools, the emphasis for transition is on career options and further education. Career education has broadened from matching a person with a job to a more comprehensive framework exploring a number of life aspects (Patton & McMahon, 1997), however, it can be argued that it still offers limited scope for support across other areas. Borgen, Amundsen & Tench (1996) reported that; "adolescents, at least in the early stages of transition, tend to be more focused on personally defined issues than on externally imposed employment issues" (p.197). Therefore, there is a distinct need to support students in all aspects of their transition, particularly those outside the vocational field (Borgen, Amundsen & Tench, 1996).

It has been found that the development of coping skills is predictive of an individual's adjustment to life events (Gall, Evans & Bellerose, 2000, p547). Borgen, Amundsen and Tench (1996) have also argued that, "the stressors of the post-high school transition may be alleviated by the opportunity to engage in meaningful activities" (p.196).

The Transitions Expo was designed to be one such meaningful activity. It aimed to provide students with support as they make the move away from school and into the wider world. This was achieved by providing students with the opportunity to learn about other support networks, in addition to the skills and strategies developed during their time at school. Subsequently, it provided young people with the opportunity to develop support networks appropriate to their needs during a time of transition.



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CASE STUDY

“A range of services are seen as necessary to support young people in making effective transitions through school and between school and post-school destinations” (MCEETYA, 2004).

“Louise reported to the school counsellor that while she knew exactly what course she wanted to do, she was nervous about leaving home and moving away to uni. The Expo provided an opportunity to speak to a University representative about student accommodation, uni clubs and the student centre. Louise also enrolled to vote, received free RACQ membership, tried some new health foods and found out about reducing stress and anxiety. Louise has reported since that she knows how to access support and feels less anxious.

Brad had indicated to a staff member that he was unhappy at school and was thinking about leaving at the end of year 10. The Transitions Expo was timely as he had the opportunity to talk to a representative from Busy @ Work about work placement to gain experience before leaving school and try out different industries. He also spoke to staff at a local mentoring program and by speaking to the local TAFE and Agricultural College he found out about courses he could take while still at school.”

Exhibitors’ feedback indicated that they found the event to be successful and all wished to be involved in future events.

“Facilities were fantastic. I was impressed with the organisation of the Expo – the set-up, the flow of the event.”

In a similar fashion, students found the event to be very valuable.

“I feel much more confident! I now have valuable info about things I need to know.”

“The whole expo was a great learning experience and one that all year 12 students should have the opportunity to attend.”

HOW TO SUPPORT A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL

“Tertiary education and career opportunities are not the sole focus of senior transitions.”

The success of the Transitions Expo is based on building on an already existing foundation of help seeking skills developed throughout each student’s life at the College. St Mary’s College understands that for students to manage their own lives confidently they need to have experienced a:

- Sense of control by experiencing competence in their own environment
- Sense of belonging and feeling wanted with family, peers and community
- Sense of meaning to feel important and able to accomplish tasks.

The College has deliberately set out through its pastoral care and LifeSkills curriculum, which incorporates programs such as Resourceful Adolescent Program (for parents and young people), Heartmasters (building resilience), and FRIENDS as well as involvement of General Practitioners and psychologists in the school to:

- Embed well-being and mental health awareness into the curriculum and classroom procedures ensuring that staff and students are educated about the issues that can arise during times of vulnerability.
- Offer universal programs to middle school students to impart coping skills and resilience from an early age.
- Meet the specific needs of students with higher support needs through targeted programs designed to address mental health problems
- Identify students along a continuum of mental health needs through self-reporting and teacher identification allowing for appropriate support to be offered at the appropriate time.
- Educate staff and students on various topics pertaining to staff professional development, student education and networks of care through the provision of guest speakers.

Relevant learning from the MindMatters Plus initiative:

“School structure and organisation needs to support mental health promotion.”

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KEY POINTS TO PLAN AND PRESENT A TRANSITIONS EXPO

- Emphasise and promote the difference between a regular Careers Expo and a Transitions Expo which goes beyond vocational and educational pathways.
 - Ensure students are involved in the planning and running of the event.
 - Promote the event as an opportunity for students to learn about a range of support pathways, agencies and networks.
 - Include information from a range of health support agencies - General Practitioners, Family Planning, Sexual Health, Community Health, Indigenous Health and Child and Youth Mental Health.
 - Include rental advice, voting enrolment information, Centrelink, government support agencies and other relevant areas.
 - Choose the timing of the event to be as inclusive as possible (held after school hours and open to the entire community).
 - Advertise widely throughout the town, in the local newspaper and on community radio. Make flyers from many local agencies such as Centrelink available.
 - Encourage all schools within the district and promote the event to students and families.
 - Design the event to assist young people with support needs and offer a chance to reconnect with support services. For example:
 - o At our Expo Unemployed or disconnected youth had the opportunity to hear about the event through general advertising as well as flyers in locations such as Centrelink. Those who are at-risk had the opportunity to attend seminars or speak to exhibitors about areas such as Government Assistance (Centrelink), IDEALS Mentoring Programs and Busy @ Work job placement which may offer them the opportunity to connect with the community through employment, training or mentoring.
 - o The presence of Health services such as GPs, Community Health and Child and Youth Mental Health along with Kids Help Line, Reach Out! and the local Parish allowed at-risk students to identify key people and services within the community that they can access and possibly reduce the fear of having to go to a new place and make an appointment.
 - Ensure a range of ways of delivering information such as information booths and mini-seminars, where exhibitors could present to groups away from the main hall.
 - Encourage young people to attend by providing sample bags and lucky draws.
 - Survey attendees and presenters to gain feedback for future events.
 - Seek sponsorship through key local partners (the Southern Queensland Division of General Practice).
- Evaluations of attendee feedback yielded the following results:
- Approximately 90% of visitors rated the Expo 7 out of 10 or higher.
 - 95% of visitors were confident about the transition from school.
 - 100% of visitors would like to see the event held again.

Given this feedback, the Transition Expo was clearly a success and will be held again in the future. Feedback will also be utilised to improve the event and to ensure that young people find it engaging, relevant and useful.

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- Relevant learning from MM Plus initiative:
- "School structure and organisation needs to support mental health promotion."
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