Career Development

A Youthline position paper

BACKGROUND

Youthline's frame of reference is supported by three building blocks: community development; training and personal/professional development; and service provision. These building blocks underpin the six elements central to Youthline's community development model:

1. Promote active participation of people in the community.
2. Engage the community to solve community issues and problems.
3. Assist the community to understand society's impact on young people .
4. Actively work to increase leadership capabilities of community members.
5. Address and take into account the needs of young people in our community.
6. Strengthen links with other community agencies working with youth.

Career development cannot be separated from the broader aspects of a young person's development. It is with this awareness, that Youthline is committed to offering an effective career development programme within its delivery of services. Youthline offers a range of training and development programmes which successfully link service provision and community involvement together. Service related alliances, training and development initiatives and an advocacy role with other youth-related community agencies create essential community linkages. Strong linkages of this kind embrace community development processes which promote the interests of youth.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Youth development strategies which focus on providing opportunities for youth to build skills, exercise leadership, form relationships with caring adults and help their communities, can assist young people to achieve their full potential, and in turn, prevent potential involvement in risky behaviour. Research has highlighted that positive developmental pathways are fostered when adolescents have developed the following:

- A sense of industry and competency (developing a stable identity and an individual's belief in her/his own ability and the potential to be a productive member of society).
- A feeling of connectedness to others and to society (provides individuals with a sense that they are connected to other persons, their community and society which in turn, assists with the creation of empathy and intimacy).
- A belief in their control over their fate in life (provides individuals with a basis for coping effectively with factors over which they have little control).
- A stable identity (fosters an individual's positive interpersonal relationships, psychological and behavioural stability and, productive adulthood (Grotevant, 1996).

As meaningful employment is a factor which may contribute to each of these potential strengthening factors, it is unsurprising that career development forms a substantial contributor to youth development. Accordingly, research has found that adolescents who develop the above characteristics appear to be more likely than others to engage in pro-social behaviours, exhibit positive school

performances, and be members of non-deviant peer groups (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1997).

'THE WORLD OF WORK'

As described above, employment which is meaningful and fulfils a sense of industry and belonging is a key protective factor in young people's lives. Benard (1986) argues that "economic conditions are among the most powerful contributors to 'at risk' behaviour". Benard believes that opportunities for young people to find meaningful work are limited and the preparation of young people to successfully attain and retain jobs is imperative. Pransky (1991) concurs, urging that if work is perceived as being available, if young people are committed to work and the organisation, if they see themselves and are seen by others as useful and contributing, they will be less likely to engage in anti-social behaviour. Clutterbuck, (1982) supports this view stating that if work, study or community service is perceived as 'meaningful' by youth, she/he can experience:

- demonstrated competence,
- increased self-worth,
- feeling and perception by others as being useful and contributing,
- a sense of belonging to the community.

There is much scope to improve the engagement of young people with employment. According to the New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development (NZBCSD) (2004) the national unemployment rate for people aged 15-25 is more than double that of the general population. This causes growing concern, as high youth unemployment is not good for local businesses, the wider economy, or the community. In recognition of this issue, NZBCSD established a Youth Employment Project, in partnership with the Mayors Taskforce for Jobs – a nationwide network of 71 mayors promoting youth engagement on local scales (Mayors Taskforce for Jobs, 2008). The objective of this project is to "lead New Zealand businesses in their role of ensuring current employment or training for all young New Zealanders by 2005".

In tackling youth employment, a target group was identified of youth who are particularly at risk of not training or working. This group is made up of:

- School leavers with little or no school qualifications,
- Sections of Māori and Pasifika youth,
- Youth who have been unemployed or under-employed (i.e. wanting more paid work than they currently have) for longer than 6 months,
- Youth with disability,
- Youth who are disconnected from access to appropriate training opportunity owing to: entry pre-requisites, intergenerational unemployment, locality, unavailability of accessible training resources, cost, and fear of student debt.

Skills shortages were identified by the NZBCSD (2004) as limiting the capacity of one in six New Zealand businesses, while one in ten young people are out of work or training. The NZBCSD state that while the unemployment rate in 2003 was declining, unemployment for young people increased. They conclude that "[s]omehow we are allowing ourselves to miss out on the tremendous wealth of energy, skills and

perspective that our young people can potentially offer" (New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2004).

Some barriers to employment in the trades may result from outdated or mistaken perceptions of opportunities within trades careers. This has resulted in trade and technical areas of the economy largely missing out on a generation of young people who thought that training in the workforce had little to offer, according to former Minister of Education, Steve Maharey (2004). A shortage exists to meet the significant demand for workplace skills within industries such as building, roading, engineering, hospitality and horticulture, to name a few. In 2004, the government made a commitment that all 15-19 year olds will be engaged in appropriate education, training or work by 2007. The government has also introduced a new skills package that will now fund 8,500 modern apprenticeships, a programme which began in 2000. This range of initiatives has had substantial success. In 2007, 185,660 people were involved in industry training (Tertiary Education Commission, 2008), up from 81,000 participants in workforce training in 2000 (Skill New Zealand, 2001).

TRANSITIONING TO WORK

Transition from school to work can be a stressful time for young people as school and work are so different. Many students find that school has not prepared them adequately for jobs, further education and training and the associated responsibilities. Watts (1997) claims it is imperative for all young people to be helped to forge careers in the broader sense of lifelong progression of learning and work. Young people who have not developed skills to manage her/himself, risk being side-lined in the rapidly evolving world of work. Internationally, several countries have identified the importance of career education and the economic and social benefits that accumulate as a result (Krumboltz, 1996; McCowan & Hyndman, 1998).

Youthline provides support for young people transitioning from school to other training or work through Youth Transition Services (YTS). Youthline currently provides services including CV preparation, job searching, interview techniques, finding a course, referrals, family support, personal development, budgeting advice, mentoring and computer/internet access. YTS is a free service available to all 15-19 year olds who have left or are leaving school across the central Auckland suburbs. Youthline's service is part of a YTS network which exists across the country, run by other providers. See http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/community/a-z-grants-and-other-help/youth-transition-service.html.

THEORETICAL CAREER DEVELOPMENT CONSTRUCTS

In addition to developing workforce-related skills in young people, Heaven (1994) also considers identity formation to be a crucial developmental task for adolescents. Deciding upon a career is an important milestone in that process. Patton and McMahon (2001) believe that efforts need to be channelled towards equipping youth with process skills so they can apply them throughout their lives and manage their own career development. Students gain the knowledge and skills to become empowered,

adaptable, persistent and resilient to career setbacks. An effective career development programme can assist young people to develop a sense of purpose and commitment towards her/his own career development. Emphasis is placed on upgrading skills and knowledge of self to better equip young people for the changing world of work, rather than merely matching them with an appropriate occupation. These ideas support a more holistic, youth development-focussed approach to career development, in contrast to the approach of providing work skills training.

More comprehensive career development programmes could assist young people, in particular those who typically hold lower career expectations and experience a lack of opportunity in employment and career development, to make an effective transition from school into meaningful work and further education. This is premised on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) which is supported by a framework centred on how students' career and academic interests develop, how their choices are made and how students' performance outcomes are achieved. Chartrand and Rose, (1996) endorsed SCCT for its use of 'constructs that account for differences in environmental opportunities as well as for individuals' beliefs about the environment'. They reinforced the importance for 'at risk' students of considering the environmental realities that influence beliefs, learning experiences and the formation of interests, goals and performance attainments.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) has developed out of Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, derived from his social learning theory of behaviour proposed in 1977. The three building blocks of career development posited by the proponents of SCCT are self-efficacy, outcome expectations and personal goals. Self-efficacy is perceived as a young person's belief in her/his capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations (Bandura, 1995). Outcome expectations relate to the perceived consequences that students believe will result from the performance of certain behaviours. It is important to note that outcome expectations become an important and unique predictor of behaviour when environmental constraints inhibit the influence of efficacy beliefs (Lent & Hackett, 1994). Goals represent a resolve of young people to engage in a particular activity or to achieve a particular future outcome. According to SCCT, the establishment of goals could assist youth to co-ordinate, guide and sustain their own behaviour (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1996). Behaviour therefore is not predetermined by a combination of past reinforcement, genes or other intervening personal factors. Actions become motivated by the self-imposed goals that the young people set.

YOUTHLINE'S POSITION

1. It is widely recognised that positive youth development contributes effectively to the social and economic wellbeing of the community. Career development is a key component in youth development as it creates a sense of industry and belonging in young people. This precept is integral to Youthline's 'whole' youth development approach.

2. Programmes to assist young people transition from school to other training or employment are of critical to assist those who are unsure of what pathways exist for them. Youthline is a provider of Youth Transition Services in the central Auckland areas. This is part of a wider network of transition services.

3. Young people attending Youthline's development programmes are at a critical developmental stage where they acquire knowledge, experience and decision-making skills which assist them to become self-determining in their personal and professional futures. An effective career development programme integrates these skills and the crucial aspects of broader youth development.

4. Youthline provides a high level of specialisation and expert knowledge in the area of youth. The organisation's philosophy and values, its contractual obligations and the need for commercial organisations, social service funding agencies and the community to see youth services work effectively for young people, provide a sound rationale for the development of a comprehensive and integrated career development programme.

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