



# Evaluating BoysTown's Western Sydney Horticulture Enterprise

*This report summarises the key findings of an evaluation undertaken from 2008 to 2010 on BoysTown's Horticulture Enterprise in Blacktown and Campbelltown, New South Wales. The evaluation looked at the performance of the service for the first group of trainees, particularly in relation to delivering sustainable outcomes for marginalised people in social housing.*

## BACKGROUND TO THE SERVICE

In 2008, BoysTown received funding support from the New South Wales Department of Housing to help establish BoysTown Horticulture Enterprises in the Campbelltown and Blacktown areas in Western Sydney. The main objective of social enterprises is to assist socially excluded young people to overcome vocational and other barriers to employment, training, education and full positive participation in society.

The Horticulture Enterprise in Western Sydney aims to provide 20 disadvantaged people living in social housing with the opportunity to experience employment in a real-life horticulture and landscaping work environment over a 12 month timeframe. The program is also a chance for the trainees to obtain accredited qualifications in Certificate II in Horticulture (Landscape).

Four crews operating with one Youth Trainer and five trainees each work on social housing properties in the Blacktown and Campbelltown areas. The trainees aim to develop and sustain a work ethic and routine as well as gain specific horticulture and landscaping skills under the guidance of a Youth Trainer. In addition, the work environment is seen as a good opportunity to develop and improve self esteem, teamwork, communication, and leadership skills amongst the trainees. A Youth Worker is also available to provide group workshops and ongoing individual case management for the trainees to address any personal barriers to participating in employment and society.

The on-the-job experiential learning and personal case management focuses on getting disadvantaged people ready for open employment. This approach is based on BoysTown's social inclusion model and Mission, "To enable young people, especially those who are marginalised and without voice, to improve their quality of life".

## WHO USES THE SERVICE?

BoysTown used a variety of methods to recruit participants from social housing for the traineeship. Participants answered advertisements, or were referred from BoysTown's Job Services and Indigenous STEP ER program, or other Indigenous, employment, drug and alcohol and mental health services.

In keeping with BoysTown's mission, the people in the Horticulture Enterprise were selected due to their serious and ongoing issues, which affected their ability to obtain and maintain work. Lack of work experience, intergenerational unemployment and early school leaving were all barriers to young people entering open employment and participating in society.

## THE ISSUE OF UNEMPLOYED YOUTH

The Blacktown and Campbelltown areas have an increasing growth rate of already high numbers of young people who are unemployed and an overrepresentation of unemployed Indigenous youth. Furthermore, the 25.8%<sup>1</sup> youth unemployment rate in the Outer Western Sydney area and the 35.1%<sup>1</sup> youth unemployment rate in the Northern Western Sydney region are substantially higher than 5.3%<sup>1</sup> national unemployment rate. In addition, people in the high density pockets of public housing estates often deal with high levels of intergenerational unemployment, early school leaving, substance abuse, family dysfunction and high crime rates.

<sup>1</sup> Data sourced from the DEEWR Labour Information Portal for the 2010 first quarter





# Horticulture Enterprise Program

## Evaluation Summary

### THE NEED FOR RESEARCH

BoysTown is committed to ensuring that all services are evidence-based and effectively address client needs. Research enhances organisational accountability and procurement of funding, as well as providing valuable information to inform strategic planning and decision-making. Evaluations are conducted by an experienced and independent research team.

#### The core objectives of this evaluation include:

1. Forge and establish regional and cross-regional inter-sectoral partnerships with appropriate government and non-government agencies, services, employers, schools and training bodies
2. Create and establish a viable, sustainable and accessible enterprise in the project target regions oriented towards individual needs of target groups, addressing identified local employment/skills shortages, and predicated on flexible learning and the 'work as therapy' model
3. Establish a training program to impart prevocational and work preparation skills, attitudes and aptitudes
4. Provide a client centred management program (vocational training / initial employment, and a suite of available support programs) which encourages the development of 'human capital' and a desire for life-long learning to marginalised youth
  - a) Impart relevant technical skills and aptitudes leading to recognised qualifications, and to enable development of clear pathways to future education and work apprenticeships
  - b) Impart appropriate personal, social and life skills, aptitudes and attitudes in order to empower young people with the self-efficacy to overcome barriers to employment / school re-engagement and training
5. Enable sustainable employment, further training, and school re-engagement outcomes

### METHOD

A mixed method approach was used in this study to assess changes in the participants as they attempted to complete the traineeship. The mixed methods involved implementing quantitative surveys and conducting semi-structured interviews with participants. Surveys were also implemented with stakeholders while interviews were conducted with BoysTown staff members.

#### Data for the evaluation was drawn from a range of sources such as:

- Document review including examination of Human Resources and Training records, BoysTown Client Information Management System, contacts lists and program files,
- Client baseline, progress and outcome measurement including surveys, interviews, training records and exit outcomes, and
- Primary data collected from trainees, program staff and stakeholders.

The main target group for the evaluation report were trainees in BoysTown's Horticulture Enterprise in Blacktown and Campbelltown. Surveys and interviews were conducted with 16 young people when they commenced the program. Due to the mobile nature of socially excluded young people, not all participants could be tracked throughout the program. Six months after the program commenced, 13 young people were interviewed, while 15 young people were interviewed and surveyed on exit.

Another group of interest for this evaluation were the program staff. The Enterprise Manager, Youth Worker and three Youth Trainers participated in interviews for this evaluation. The Enterprise Manager and Youth Trainers had been employed at the beginning of the Horticulture Enterprise working with the first and second groups of young people while the Youth Worker had predominantly worked with the second group of trainees.



# Horticulture Enterprise Program

## Evaluation Summary

The third group of interest for this evaluation were the stakeholders from the funding body of Housing NSW. Three participants from various levels of the department responded to an email survey about the enterprise. Further feedback was provided through presentations of the initial evaluation results from five Housing NSW employees.

### Profile of trainees

All participants lived in social housing which was a requirement of the funding contract. The one female and 20 male participants in the evaluation ranged in age from 16 to 48 years (average=22 years). In terms of ethnic background, 48% were Aboriginal, 5% were Polynesian and the remainder were of Anglo Saxon/ Celtic background. To describe the situation of the trainees further:

- 43% lived in a single-parent home
- 33% lived with their two parents
- 14% lived with their partner
- 52% grew up in household where the parent or guardian did not work
- 71% had no fulltime work experience, and
- 76% left school before completing Year 10.

Many young people indicated that their technical skills were not adequate, particularly in relation to using initiative, work tools and on-the-job skills. In addition, many trainees had difficulties with goals, life skills, teamwork, communication, drugs, alcohol, anger management, problem solving and offending behaviour.

### EVALUATION FINDINGS

The data from stakeholder surveys and group feedback, staff interviews and trainee interviews and surveys were compiled and analysed to form the findings of this evaluation.

### Partnerships

Stakeholders were satisfied with the Horticulture Enterprise and the way the program met their expectations. A number of key strengths of the enterprise were noted, including:

- Team leadership
- Skills and positive attitudes of the staff and management
- Commitment of the staff and trainees to providing quality service to a range of people, and
- Support and pride in the program from the staff and trainees.

Stakeholders also commented on the benefits for the community from having the Horticulture Enterprise operating in the Blacktown and Campbelltown areas. These benefits as reported by stakeholders included:

- Young people in social housing looking forward to a hopeful future
- Changes in the perception of the community that young people were unemployable and do not or will not learn new skills
- Increases in feelings of safety amongst residents due to the presence of the enterprise crews working around the community
- Improvements in the environment for people in social housing areas, and
- Newly-formed pride from the residents in their homes leading to better care of their properties.



# Horticulture Enterprise Program

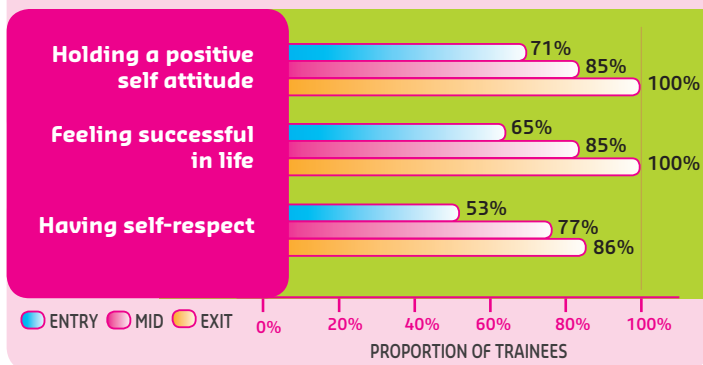
## Evaluation Summary

### Self-Esteem

Acceptance into the program was seen by trainees as an opportunity to make a new start and there was excitement at the prospect of working, learning new skills and earning money. This was reflected in the normal to high self-esteem scores from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale from the time young people commenced the enterprise to when they left the enterprise. Self-esteem showed improvement as young people progressed through the traineeship (see Figure 1 below).

Specifically, 71% of trainees at the start of the program had a positive self attitude, which continued to increase to 100% of trainees at the point of exit. A similar trend was seen in relation to young people feeling successful in their lives. One-in-three trainees at the start of the enterprise reported feeling like a failure, which decreased to 15% midway through the program. On completing the traineeship, none of the trainees reported feeling like a failure. In addition, self respect was evident in 53% of trainees at the start of the program which increased to 77% in the mid-stage and then 86% at the exit point.

Figure 1: Perceived improvements by the trainees in their self-esteem



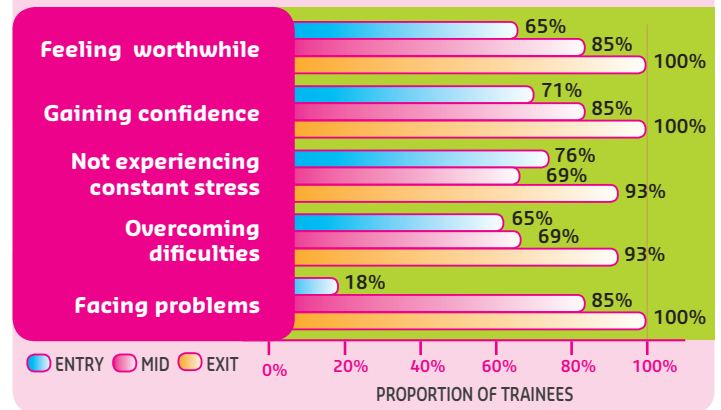
### Emotional Wellbeing

Responses to the General Health Questionnaire indicated the wellbeing of young people commencing the traineeship was at a high level and even more so at exit (see Figure 2). The 35% of young people who had been feeling worthless and 29% who were losing

confidence in themselves before commencing the enterprise were starting to feel worthwhile and gain confidence as they progressed through the program. Specifically, only 15% of young people during the traineeship were experiencing feelings of worthlessness and losing confidence which decreased to 0% by the time of exit.

The most drastic improvement showed in young people facing up to their problems. Only 18% of trainees at the start of the enterprise reported being able to acknowledge their problems. It is even more interesting that 65% of the trainees at the start indicated that they were capable of overcoming their difficulties but they were unsure of where to start and how to approach their problems. As the enterprise progressed, 85% reported facing their problems while 69% could overcome their issues. On exit, almost all of the trainees could face up to and overcome their difficulties.

Figure 2: Perceived changes by the trainees in their emotional wellbeing



### Antisocial and criminal behaviour

Improvements from the time of entry to exit were also seen in antisocial and criminal behaviour in the young people, as shown in Figure 3. Anger management was a major concern for half of the young people when they commenced. Specifically, 47% of young people at the start of the enterprise reported with anger management problems, which improved to only 7% of young people at the end of the program. Young people reported thinking more about the consequences of their actions because they did not want to be expelled from the program and in some instances they were required to be on good behaviour due to court proceedings. Small

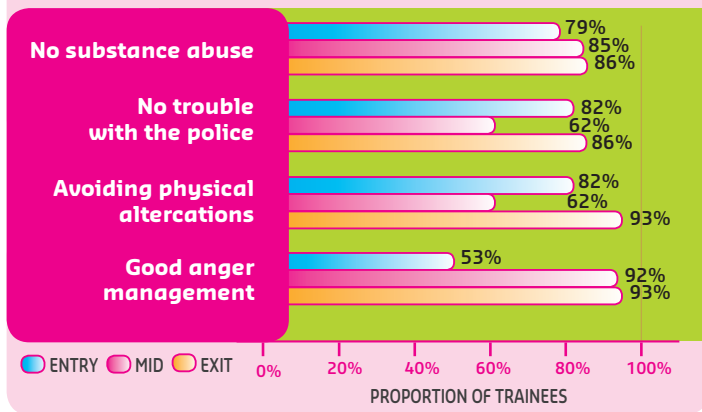


# Horticulture Enterprise Program

## Evaluation Summary

improvements were seen in substance abuse during the time of the program.

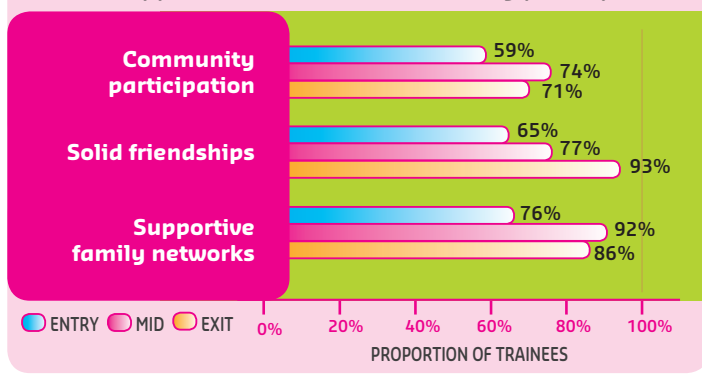
Figure 3: Perceived changes by the trainees in their antisocial and criminal behaviour.



### Social Support Networks

Part of the process of improving social inclusion for young people includes building social networks and participating more in the community. Many young people in the enterprise already had strong family networks for support when they commenced. Higher proportions of young people with family support were seen as the program progressed. Young people also indicated seeing the value of surrounding themselves with reliable and trustworthy friends in order to keep out of trouble. Two-thirds of the trainees at entry had strong friendship networks, which increased to 77% midway through the program, and then 93% at the completion of the program. At the start of the enterprise, 59% were involved in the community compared with 71% at the end of the traineeship. These results are shown in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Perceived improvements by trainees in their social support networks and community participation.

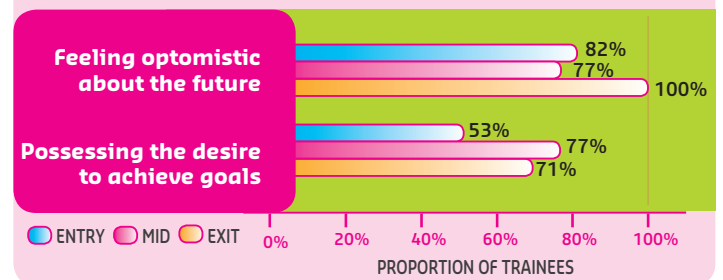


### Optimism and Aspirations

One key turning point in engaging young people in social enterprises appears to be the development of aspirations and optimism. Figure 5 shows the perceived improvements in optimism and the development of aspirations as the trainees progressed from the start of the enterprise to the exit point. Many young people in the interviews commented that being accepted into the traineeship was the opportunity they had been waiting for and were very excited about their future.

Specifically, 82% were optimistic about the future. By the end of the program, 100% were hopeful about the future. At the start of the program, 53% had aspirations for the future to work in landscaping which increased to 71% at exit. Towards the end of the program, some young people were unsure about whether or not they wanted to continue in the landscaping industry.

Figure 5: Perceived improvements by trainees in their optimism and aspirations.



### Outcomes for Clients

The social enterprise was an opportunity for trainees to earn accredited training qualifications whilst undertaking paid work. Altogether, 60% of the trainees obtained either a Certificate I or II in Horticulture (Landscape).

A key objective of the enterprise was to develop and improve the vocational and non-vocational skills of trainees to prepare them for open employment. After exiting the program, 78% of trainees achieved employment or education outcomes. Furthermore, 72% of the trainees were working or studying for at least 13 weeks after exiting the enterprise. The trainees who had completed the program and who



# Horticulture Enterprise Program

## Evaluation Summary

had not found employment were then referred to BoysTown's Job Services.

The young people who exited the Horticulture Enterprise obtained employment in landscaping, warehousing and roof insulation. There have been instances of young people commencing a job and then realising they were not interested in that area of work. However, these young people then found other jobs soon afterwards and remained in employment. This information together with the sustainable outcomes and the interview data suggests that the young people in the Horticulture Enterprise have developed a routine of working, grown accustomed to earning a wage and now aspire to remain in employment.

### DISCUSSION

There were a number of strengths of the Horticulture Enterprise. These revolved around BoysTown staff, the case management practices, personal development in trainees and the obtainment of outcomes.

Stakeholders from the funding body commented on the approachable and open manner of BoysTown staff members in the consultation process between the parties. These communication skills were useful in helping reach a common understanding between people in the process. The patient leadership and communication styles of the Youth Trainers also assisted in engaging and teaching the trainees.

The first group of trainees only experienced case management support from a Youth Worker for a short time. Fortunately, the employment of a subsequent Youth Worker has seen the second group benefit from pre-employment training and ongoing individual case management. The Youth Trainers indicated that the pre-employment training assisted the trainees to develop basic skills for entry into the enterprise. In addition, the Youth Trainers stated that the employment of the Youth Worker lessened their workload in terms of writing case notes.

The trainees showed improvements across a range of personal, social and life skills. In particular, the trainees reported improvements in facing and overcoming their problems, control of emotions, developing self respect, building supportive social networks and working towards aspirations.

Although less than half of the trainees achieved outcomes when exiting the enterprise, three-in-four were eventually in employment or education in the weeks after the program finished. Eventually, most young people were employed in landscaping, warehousing and roof insulation. In addition to obtaining outcomes, most of these young people remained in employment or education for at least 13 weeks.

There were also a number of areas in the Horticulture Enterprise that could be improved. These issues were in relation to the literacy and numeracy levels of some trainees and recruitment of female trainees.

Following on from this report, longitudinal research will be conducted to assess the personal, social, employment and training outcomes for the first group of trainees one year after completing the program. This will allow further insight into the longitudinal outcomes for disadvantaged people who have been given an opportunity to earn work skills and qualifications as steps progressing towards social inclusion.

*Author: Salote Mafi, Senior Research Officer, BoysTown.  
Written September 2010*

*For further details on the evaluation please contact  
BoysTown's Strategy and Research Team.*