



Youth Transitions Services through Schools

City of Manukau Education Trust / Discussion Paper 06/3

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Introduction

The COMET Manukau Youth Transitions Project operates *in partnership* with schools. This means that, unlike other youth transitions services, the brokers are based in the school, working alongside the pastoral care team including Deans, the Careers Teacher, the Transitions Teacher, the Gateway Co-ordinator and any guidance counsellor, truancy or community workers based in the school. However, this service is still a *community-directed* service.

It is a community-directed service because the brokers are employed by a COMET, a community organisation, not by the schools; and their work outcomes are reported to community and *linked to community strategic objectives for youth employment* (through the Mayor's Taskforce for Jobs).

This paper argues that it is important to sustain over time a partnership between schools and community to support post-school destinations for youth.

Placing services in schools vs placing services in the community

A school is a permanent, long-term institution. It is important to ensure that schools and communities work

together, because the school is there long after political commitment for youth transitions support may have moved on.

The advantages of placing a community broker in the school are:

- The service has access to information on clients from school data-bases and school personnel, avoiding privacy issues;
- There is an ability to immediately pick up on those that fall out of school – i.e. no 'lag' in being able to offer post-school placement support;
- Connections to school support programmes are readily made;
- The service is visible to students and their families; and the brokers have "legitimacy" in the eyes of families in working alongside whanau members;
- Brokers are able to provide 'feedback' to schools about outcomes for young people, which can be incorporated into school processes – eg. tightening internal systems for following up senior absences; school-leaving support systems; and curriculum decisions;
- There is school 'ownership' of the service and its outcomes.

However, there are disadvantages of placing a broker in the school. These include:

- Non-enrolled school-leavers are not referred to the service- there is no data available on the size of

- the non-enrolment problem in the communities being served;
- There are fewer community-based referrals;
- There is only restricted ability to include youth who are no longer at school;
- Community perceptions about school services.

There are a number of significant challenges in partnership processes with schools, but the value of the partnership is that school issues and community issues become mutual issues.

As in any partnership, there are tensions and dilemmas facing brokers, who have community responsibilities, but are working inside schools. In COMET's view, the ways in which those tensions and dilemmas are resolved adds strength to school-community partnership processes.

School- community partnership processes

The work of a youth transitions broker is with *school-leavers*, not with students. However, it is important to understand that the transition process begins when young person is still at school. The connection between the school and the youth transitions service is, therefore, critical.

For all of the schools with whom we have worked, **Critical Path Mapping** has been important. Each school has a different process for

- School-leaver procedures:
 - "Signing out" during the year;
 - In August when "Student Intentions Sheets" are filled out for the following year;
 - For "signing out" at the end of the year.
- Absence tracking and truancy

- One-to-three day absences
- 21-day absences – students can be automatically taken off the roll
- Intermittent attendance.
- Following up on non-returnees.
- Monitoring and/or supporting the work of attendance officers; or engaging with external truancy services.

To obtain **referrals**, the COMET youth transitions broker will, therefore,

- Establish a relationship with the staff officer who does the data entry for attendance;
- Obtain lists from deans/careers or pastoral care officers of school-leavers at the *end* of the year;
- Obtain lists from deans of non-returnees at the *beginning* of the year;
- Work closely with the attendance officer to identify chronic absentees (years 11, 12 or 13) who have, in effect, left school (including the 21-day absentees).
- Monitor the "school-leaving" system to ensure that a "safety net" is in place for youth so that a positive post-school destination can be worked on;
- Maintain regular personal contact with staff throughout the year, generating referrals through in-school networks.

The brokers apply the Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa to their work.

Examples of tensions

A class-size group of students at one school have been identified as 'not achieving' credits or gaining other academic value from the school programme. The school wishes to move these students on, so that it can

concentrate on supporting those who are gaining credits.

The youth transitions broker is given the list of names. The usual process is that the prospective school-leaver is interviewed by the broker, and then the family is contacted so that a mutually acceptable post-school destination can be proposed.

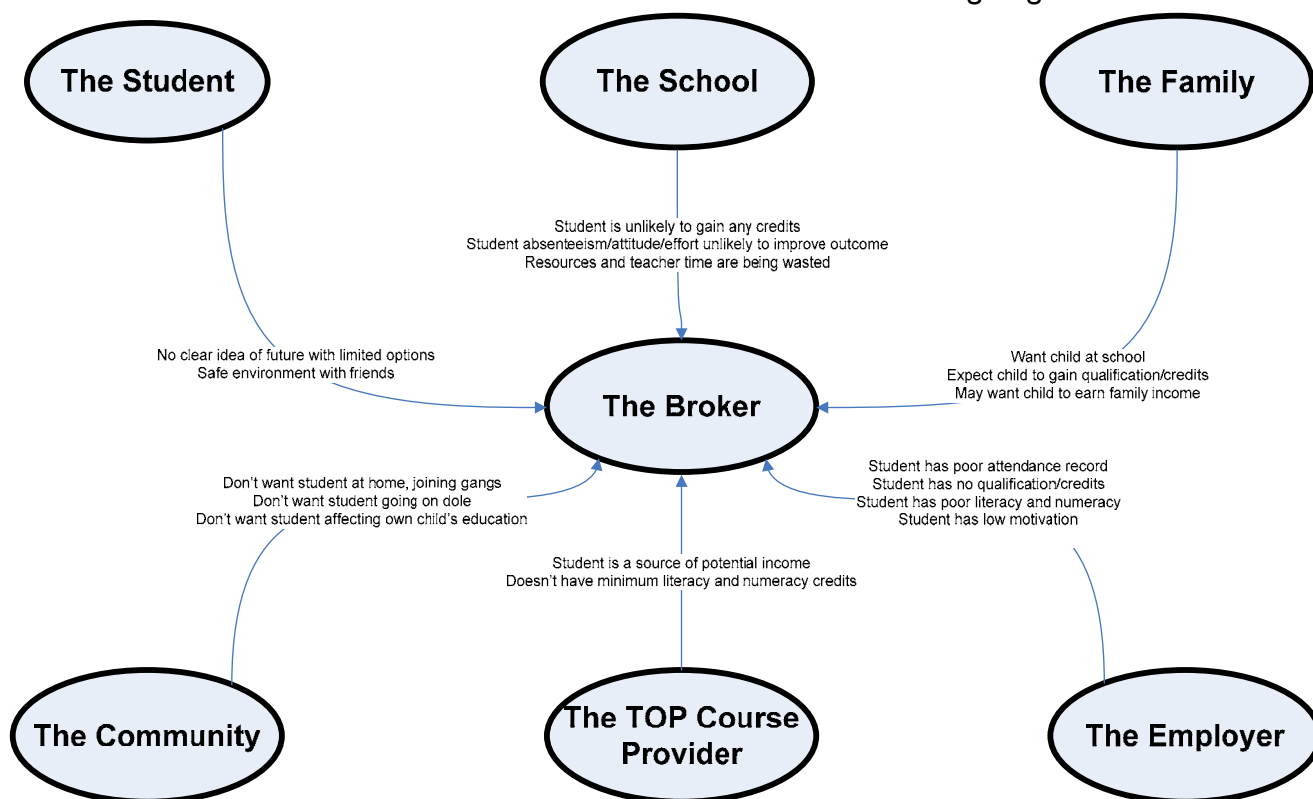
The students do not have good employment prospects without basic literacy and numeracy credits. Youth Training and TOPs courses would be suitable.

The broker visits the families. A number of families are upset by the news that the broker's job is to "help the school-leaver" find a post-school destination. Why can't the young person stay at school?

Perspectives

A number of competing perspectives impact on the work of the broker. The young person appears to have few choices in the above scenario. The school and the family are clearly important, but there are other indirect perspectives that also impact on the broker's work. For example, the community will judge the actions of the school, the broker, and the young person in various ways. Firstly, no community wants its youth "wandering the streets". On the other hand, no-one wants their own child in a classroom where there is disruptive behaviour, or where other students have 'opted out' of learning. Schools have to consider parental and community insistence on an orderly learning environment.

We have illustrated the broker's tension in the following diagram:



How should the youth transitions broker respond?

As the word implies, a broker is a mediator to support a process for the young person.

Using the **youth development model** of the Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa, the broker is required to consider the needs of the student, the family, the school, and the employer / training organisation – and empower the young person to make good decisions. Should the broker:

- Work with the school to address the curriculum and achievement issues for this “class” of students whose parents do not want them to leave? This would be outside the expertise, mandate or authority of the broker.
- Challenge the school for walking away from its responsibilities? This would be an abuse of hospitality and partnership.
- Work alongside the school to ensure the school-leavers will be safely supported to make a transition? This could be seen as condoning school practices of encouraging students to leave rather than addressing their needs.
- Persuade the families that this is the “best thing” for their whanau member, who is not gaining value from their schooling?
- Work with the young person so that they get a job? Since the young person has limited choices, it is likely there will be low pay and poor job satisfaction over time. The ethical response will be to make sure that the young person is monitored through a number of possible options until it is clear that a stable transition has been made.
- Work with the young person so that they get enrolled in a course?

The ethical response would be to find a course that doesn't have student fees, but this is not always possible.

Outcome

The broker has worked with the school to place one of these young people back into the school programme. The other 19 students are gradually being placed into a post-school destination over the next three months, operating an individual approach for each client. A ‘youth mentoring’ approach requires that each client will receive follow-up visits and phone calls over the following six months to ensure that a safe transition is made.

Policy matters

A number of policy matters impacting on youth transitions have been highlighted by the tensions facing youth transitions brokers.

School Policy:

Curriculum design is a school responsibility. Schools must be encouraged to shape the curriculum to meet the needs of all students.

Community engagement efforts from schools are highly variable. What policy does the school have to support community partnerships around youth transitions?

Social Policy:

The Youth Development model is inclusive of youth that are also at school. How it can be applied in schools? How can schools become more aware of the Youth Development model, and incorporate it into school policies, philosophies and practice? There is a substantial stream of work involved in meeting this challenge.

Education Policy:

A youth transitions service, to be effective, requires both community and school input. How does the Ministry of Education policy and investment priority on “family and community engagement” impact on youth transitions policy?

Youth Transitions Policy:

Should services be located in schools? There is no automatic information transfer about school-leavers from schools to community agencies. The potential exists for large groups of young people to be ‘encouraged to leave’ by schools, who would later have to be ‘picked up’ by community-based services, should there be no service in the school.

On the other hand, *with good resource support*, schools can be encouraged to establish sustainable, long-term community relationships that support youth transitions, and allow them to share the responsibility for ensuring that young people are well-equipped to reach positive post-school destinations.

Conclusion

The transition process for young people begins at school. The challenge in providing youth transitions services is to engage *schools* in the process in a way which enables the connection between school and post-school destinations to be seamless.

In addition, the feedback to schools about their existing processes invites them to analyse systems and institute appropriate changes if required.

It should be possible for young people to access a service without first being identified as “in risk” or anchorless in

the community once they have already left. However, the reality is that there exists also a group of potential clients who are not engaged with schools.

Both of these client groups need to be served by youth transitions services.

SELECTED RELEVANT READING:

Ministry of Social Development. (2003). *Young People Not in Education Training or Employment: Key Indicators*.

Ministry of Social Development. (2003). *Youth Transitions Report Series 2003: Executive Summary: Key Findings on Youth Transitions*.

Ministry of Youth Affairs. (2002). *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa*.

Ministry of Youth Affairs. (2002). *Youth Development Literature Review: Building Strength – A review of research on how to achieve good outcomes for young people in their families, peer groups, schools, careers and communities*.

Youthworks Stakeholders’ Group: Papakura District Council, Tertiary Education Commission & Ministry of Social Development. (2006). *Youthworks: An evaluation of the Papakura Youthworks Programme for NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) young people*.