



Together we care and grow

History of the Youth & Community Learning Centre Version 1

The Youth & Community Learning Centre [YCLC] is a flexible learning centre situated at 63 Ruthven St, Toowoomba.

In its early years, YCLC was always described as "... a social justice initiative of the Toowoomba Catholic Education Office [TCEO]." The centre had been started by then TCEO Director, Bill Sultmann, after secondary principals had found that there were large numbers of Indigenous young people in Toowoomba who were not attending school and some who had been out of formal schooling for some time.. Thus the centre was established to offer another opportunity to those young people "... for whom mainstream education is no longer an option." Initially enrolments came from the juvenile justice system or from local secondary schools that were about to expel a student; now the reputation of the centre is such that young people are often referred by family members or other young people enrolled at the centre. The centre aims to provide an alternative pathway for young people to re-engage in mainstream schools to go on to further training or employment. In November 2001 the centre received an Excellence in Education Award from the Australian College of Education for work in assisting Indigenous youth at risk.

The centre opened in June 2000 with TCEO funding; Enterprise & Career Education Foundation [ECEEF]¹ funding was approved for 12 months in January 2001 and then for a further 12 months in January 2002. Project funds covered the salaries of the program coordinator and other staff, consumables, promotion and marketing costs.

YCLC initially started as an annex of St Joseph's College [a TCEO secondary school located in Toowoomba] and linked into the college's Aboriginal Student Support & Parent Awareness [ASSPA]² committee. YCLC was granted registration as an independent school in January 2002; this meant that it then received standard per-capita state and commonwealth funding but this was less than was necessary for running costs. Until 2014, when the Queensland State Government substantially increased their grants to Flexible Learning Centres, the centre relied on the generosity of the TCEO for the funding necessary to run the site.

The centre started with seven staff and nine young people; it has now stabilised to 4.5 staff and a maximum enrolment of 20 young people. Initially the centre had an all-Indigenous enrolment but, since 2004, has enrolled non-Indigenous young people. As young people are picked up by the centre's vehicles each morning, enrolment has always been restricted to the immediate Toowoomba area. Young people must be aged 13-17 years at enrolment.

¹ The Enterprise & Career Education Foundation [ECEEF], formerly the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation [ASTF], was established with funding from the Australian Commonwealth Government to promote opportunities for young people to gain workplace knowledge and experience before graduating from secondary school.

² The Commonwealth Government's Aboriginal Student Support & Parent Awareness [ASSPA] program was designed to improve educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in preschool, primary and high school, and to increase parents' participation in their children's education. Once an ASSPA committee was established in a school, funding was available for a wide variety of activities, programs and equipment to raise participation in, and attendance at, school by Indigenous young people. These included the purchase of special equipment and teaching resources, and funding for educational and sporting excursions, nutrition and health education programs. ASSPA committees could provide a School Award System for Indigenous students who had great attendance and who promoted and shared Indigenous culture within their schools.

In collaboration with the staff and their caregiver, each young person completes a Personalised Learning Plan [PLP]. This PLP is an individual education plan which outlines their goals and the learning programme necessary to achieve these goals. The PLP is used for subsequent monitoring of progress and is reported upon and re-negotiated each semester.

YCLC is situated in the buildings of the former Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St Benedict primary school. This site has been used for several purposes over time:

- 1958-1978: Our Lady Help of Christians Primary School
- 1980-1996: Catholic Education Office Resource Centre and Religious Education Centre
- 1997-June 2000: Storage facility for Toowoomba diocese and parishes
- June 2000-present: Youth & Community Learning Centre

The original school buildings have been substantially renovated since June 2000 to suit the purposes of a flexible learning centre.

- 2001: Refurbishment of the Manual Arts room, building of disabled toilet. Total cost: \$53 420 [Commonwealth grant of \$48 420, \$5000 from TCEO]
- 2002: Upgrading of reception and office areas, computer room [now principal's office], common room and kitchen. Total cost: \$153 727 [Commonwealth grant of \$148 727, \$5000 from TCEO]. Blessed by Fr Peter Dorfield and officially opened by The Hon Mr Ian Macfarlane MP, Federal Member for Groom on 14 May, 2004.
- 2003: Upgrading toilet facilities and provision of a shed for automechanics. Total cost: \$70 928 [State grant of \$59 665, \$11 263 from TCEO]. Blessed by Fr Peter Dorfield and officially opened by Mr Kerry Shine MP, State Member for Toowoomba North on 14 May, 2004.
- 2008: 24 computers as part of the Commonwealth government's programme
- 2009: Refurbishing upstairs classrooms. Total cost: \$64 525 [Building the Education Revolution: National School Pride (NSP) grant of \$57 000, \$8679 from TCEO]
- 2009: Construct the resource centre [named the John Colwell Resource Centre in December 2013] and new female toilets plus the refurbishment of the gate

and entrance area. Total cost: \$297 489 [Building the Education Revolution: Primary Schools for the 21st Century (P21) programme]

- 2010: New male and staff toilets, outdoor deck area, covered basketball court, car park and driveway, refurbishment of Manual Arts room. \$1 010 799 [State government grant]
- 2015: Trade Training Centre; automotive workshop. \$473 264 [Commonwealth grant; this was a joint application with St Joseph's College]

There have been four principals at the centre:

June 2000-June 2004: Ian Hunter

June-December 2000: Peter Hurley [acting]

January 2005-December 2013: John Colwell

January 2014-present: Bill Smith

The centre has had four operating principles since it opened:

- Participation: If you want participation, then **have a go**.
- Self-esteem, consideration and care: If you want **respect**, be respectful.
- Honesty and openness: If you want honesty, be **fair dinkum**.
- Regard for communal and personal rights: If you want safety, be **safe and legal**.

Starting in 2008 the YCLC staff and community worked with the Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools Project {IDEAS}³ team from the Leadership Research Institute, University of Southern Queensland on a vision and mission for the centre. The logo [see logo at top of page 1] and vision [*Together we care and grow*] come from the image of a fern growing out of the brick foundations of the stairs to the upstairs classrooms; this represented the ability of things to survive and grow in a less-than-satisfactory environment. The four aspects of the mission statement for the centre are closely allied with the values of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan and are:

³ The Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools Project {IDEAS} was developed in the Australian school context by researchers at the Leadership Research Institute, University of Southern Queensland. The IDEAS approach towards school revitalisation recognised pedagogical issues and harnessed the hidden capacity of the teaching profession as crucial elements of school revitalisation.

- We will be fair
- We will work in harmony
- We will celebrate success
- We will act with compassion

Since 2004 YCLC has hosted three complementary programmes at the centre:

- September 2004- December 2005: Plug-In run by Donna Crawford
- 2006: WITY run by Gerry Ley and AJ Doigh
- 2006-2012: *Get Set for Work*⁴ run by Justin Pengilly

⁴ *Get Set for Work* was a Queensland Government programme which aimed to provide young people aged 15-19 years with nationally recognised training, combined with integrated learning support measures and foundation skills, that would enable them to successfully transition to employment and/or further education and training. Young people at YCLC often moved into the *GSFW* programme.