



# Improving Benalla Student Outcomes

## Education Benalla Program Outline

2010 - 2015

Benalla is highly socially disadvantaged, rating in the “top 40” of disadvantage across Victoria’s 726 postcodes investigated as part of Prof. Tony Vinson’s 2007 study.

As a community foundation, Tomorrow:Today has investigated the nature of this problem with many local and external experts providing considerable assistance over a two year period from 2007.

The 2007 study that prompted Tomorrow:Today’s investigation - *“Dropping Off the Edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia”* was researched by Prof. Tony Vinson. He noted in his report that it was difficult to deny the centrality of limited education and its impact on the acquisition of economic and life skills in the making and sustaining of disadvantage in Australia. In relation to education, Benalla has a number of problems that are either the consequence of social disadvantage, or that

increase levels of social disadvantage. These problems include a growing number of children starting school without the range of skills necessary to move forward with learning, reducing levels of literacy and numeracy in the early school years, low levels of wellbeing amongst the student population, a disproportionately high level of school leaving prior to Year 12, a concentration of Year 12 completers without tertiary qualifications in low-skilled occupations that are the least secure, and an inability for families to financially support the transition of children to higher education or training.

A program to achieve real change in educational attainment levels was researched and developed, in conjunction with many parties including a supportive partnership between Tomorrow:Today Foundation and Hume Regional Office of the Department of Education & Early Childhood Development.

## Our Approach

Benalla's schools have been adapting and responding to meet student needs within the school system for a number of years. However it is the impact of social disadvantage at home and in the community, as well as at school that is limiting our children's life chances. The combination of attitudes, wellbeing, early success in literacy/numeracy, financial constraints and positive role models all have a role to play in a young person's decision to stay on, or turn away from education.

Our commitment is to achieve substantial measurable change in levels of student educational attainment, via a whole-of-community response that spans family, community and school. As a community foundation, Tomorrow:Today is able to draw together the many streams of individual and institutional expertise -- local and external -- to frame and implement a program that is right for Benalla.

Our approach is a community development model of action, with cross-institutional support across public agencies and community groups crucial. The program commenced implementation in 2010. There is a focus on families with babies and toddlers. Nursery rhymes, socialising and wonder-at-the-world all help establish pre-literacy and numeracy skills as well as family connectedness to social and allied health supports. There is also a focus on all Year 9 students. Introducing 15 year olds to new hobbies, different sports and interesting people at work helps Year 9's to set their own life and career goals. We train and support community mentors, and work extensively with the many sports, hobby and arts groups in Benalla to help build connections with teenagers. We also fund "Hands on Learning" curriculum change in partnership with Benalla College. Annually, we support community groups by way of small grants to enable their volunteer support base to undertake community projects that address educational or community connectedness goals.

We believe that it will take 10 years of active resourcing to achieve sustainable change in our young people's educational achievements. It has been designed in two, five year phases, with a stop/go decision at the end of Phase I. Our progress is being measured annually, and we expect that the impact will continue to mount over time. By 2030 the education and training completion rates for Benalla's 17 – 24 year olds will equal or exceed the Victorian average for non-disadvantaged districts.

## Program Summary

### Aims –

Significant and sustained improvement in:

- \* Number of students completing Year 12
- \* Number of Benalla's young people (17-20) transitioning to tertiary education
- \* Number of Benalla's young people (18-24 years) completing a diploma or degree
- \* Number of Benalla's young people successfully completing an apprenticeship

### Objectives –

1. All Benalla & District children start school ready to learn
2. Literacy and numeracy levels are measurably improved
3. Student-assessed levels of wellbeing improved to moderate or high
4. Family and community raise expectations for students to go on to tertiary education or training

### Desired Outcome –

Education and training completion rates for Benalla 17 – 24 year olds will equal or exceed the Victorian average for non-disadvantaged districts.

### Methodology

A whole-of-community development program ("place-based") that spans family, community and school life.

### Sub-Programs –

1. School readiness and early years (0-8 yrs)
2. Student Wellbeing
3. Transition to tertiary education
4. Community grants

## Resourcing

We work with all parties to broker financial resourcing. Whilst some components of the program are clearly the domain of government, other projects and activities are resourced by external philanthropic donors as well as through the generosity and actions of local Benalla people.

## Sub-Program 1: School Readiness & Early Years

Responds to Program Objectives: 1. All Benalla and district children start school ready to learn  
2. Literacy and numeracy levels are measurably improved

### Overview

The purpose of this subprogram is to support the development of strong ties between primary carer and child and between primary carer and their community. This will include small group activities that develop social skills, parenting skills and connectedness to other families. It will develop pre-literacy and numeracy skills. The sub-program will create numerous social opportunities for families, including opportunities for Benalla's children and their families in Prep, Grade 1 and 2 to become active contributors to their school community; and it will build literacy and numeracy.

~ From birth to school commencement, engage carers and pre-school children in regular, habitual small group activities to promote community connectedness, wonder at the world, and pre-literacy/numeracy.

~ Raise literacy and numeracy standards by Grade 2 assessment via school supported activities.

~ Enable school-family-community interaction that results in the most disadvantaged families becoming active contributors to their school community.

### Comments

The Vinson report found that Benalla ranked relatively poorly in terms of pre-school participation. Anecdotal evidence suggest there could be considerable improvement in linkages and support for children moving through from Maternal and Child Health programs, to day-care provision, to pre-school. Part of the Program's work will be to continue to respond to the changing landscape of service provision and volunteer input in the community to ensure that existing activities have increased participation rates, and additional programs and activities are resourced. Tomorrow:Today's programs will "dovetail in" with a range of existing services.

## Sub-Program 2: Wellbeing of Students

Responds to Program Objectives: 3. Student-assessed levels of wellbeing improved to moderate or high  
4. Family and community raise expectations for students to go on to tertiary education or training

### Overview

This Program will use a range of literacy, numeracy, performing arts, hobby and sport clubs, as well as mentoring projects, to build connections between teenagers, families, community and school. It will operate in Benalla's two secondary schools (public and Catholic) and in the community. Some school based projects will also be resourced such as the "Hands on Learning" project where students are part of a small group working with local tradespeople to achieve success in completing infrastructure projects (with literacy and numeracy knowledge developed on the job). Examples of community based projects include the "Connect9" community mentoring project that links Year 9s with existing clubs and societies and provides mentoring support through regular weekly activities during Term 2 or 3 each year.

### Comments

Benalla's teenagers generally report low levels of wellbeing, compared to state wide averages. The presence or absence of wellbeing is due to a combination of environmental factors across and within the community, home and school; as well as individual factors such as cognitive ability and personal resilience. Australian research identifies that it is possible to impact on children's wellbeing by improving environmental factors. The range of funded projects will be of direct and lasting benefit to Benalla's teenagers.

### **Sub-Program 3: Transition to Tertiary Education**

Responds to Program objective: 4. Family and community raise expectations for students to go on to tertiary education or training.

Overview Sometimes it's simply a matter of a small amount of money and some encouragement for students to be able to progress to university or a trade. Whilst we know that in most cases, it is a combination of factors that results in a low rate of transition to, or completion of, apprenticeships or tertiary studies, there are always a number of young people who have the dreams and the determination, but not the resources. This Program will enlist practical support for individual students. Supporters will help with transport, furniture, lodgings, life skills and study skills.

Comments The Program will work with teenagers, school leaders and community volunteers.

### **Sub-Program 4: Community Grants**

Responds to Program objective:

1. All Benalla & District children start school ready to learn
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3. Student-assessed levels of wellbeing improved to moderate or high
4. Family and community raise expectations for students to go on to tertiary education or training

Overview The success of this whole-of-community program will ultimately be dictated by how well the community of Benalla and district – individuals, families, businesses, agencies, schools and community groups – understand the scope of the program and embrace it. Different sections of the community will seek to make the program work for them and for their priorities. Annual community grants are a mechanism for promoting discussion about the program's objectives, staying open to new ideas, and enabling energetic groups to make a difference.

Comments The Program will provide funding to groups proposing projects that help build community connectedness, that help improve student outcomes, and/or that respond to issues of social disadvantage.

## **About Tomorrow:Today Foundation**

Tomorrow:Today Foundation is Benalla district's Community Foundation, formed and run by local people to provide funds for local community projects. Our purpose is to enable the people of Benalla and district to create a stronger, more resilient and prosperous rural community. Visit our website at [www.tomorrowtoday.com.au](http://www.tomorrowtoday.com.au) for information.

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