I am the special education teacher at the Brisbane Youth Education and Training Centre. This is an Education Queensland school located wholly within the grounds of the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre. This paper is very simply to share some of the programs we are currently running in our school. My hope is that other educators from other schools will also share their programs with me to take back and implement in our school.

We have the capacity for 120 students, although usually sit around the 100 mark. We cater for juvenile offenders aged from 10 to 17, although often sentenced children will stay with us up to 18 or 19 years old or even older. We cater for male children in Queensland from Rockhampton Southwards as there is another centre in Townsville for boys. We cater for every female child offender in Queensland. Our population is generally made up of between 45 and 50% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. About 20% of our students have a verified disability and about 25% are students in the care of the state. Students under the age of 15 are placed in middle school with an emphasis on National Curriculum (although aimed at the level of students). Students over 15 are placed in Senior School with an emphasis on Vocational Education and Training (VET).

When I first came to the school a few years ago, I was shocked at the politics surrounding working in an environment with so many departmental stakeholders. I was used to simply coming up with an idea and the principal saying yay or nay. It wasn’t like that in this environment. Everything had to go through the Dept. of Communities and the Dept. of Health as well as through our own department before anything could happen. Luckily for me though, management has been changing their philosophy to incorporate a therapeutic approach rather than a solely disciplinary approach. The centre has been trialling a new ‘Positive Behaviour Support’ strategy. This has allowed us to start a whole new set of programs aimed at teaching the whole student rather than just teaching literacy, numeracy and VET.

The whole school runs a program called ‘You Can Do It’. This focuses on 5 key areas:

- Confidence
Each week a different key is chosen. The teacher in charge of the program provides lesson ideas for use in the classroom and each class spends at least part of a lesson each week on that topic.

As with your own settings, you would know that many of our students are parents or are in the process of becoming parents. The “save the children” foundation teaches a parenting program at the school. Pregnant girls and parents have first priority for access to this class. The program is designed to teach both the basic fundamentals of child care such as changing nappies, making bottles and bathing babies, and also the deeper issues surrounding child care like how domestic violence affects children and recognising childhood illnesses. One of the areas that the students enjoy is learning how to effectively play with your child.

One of the more controversial programs started has been the teaching of sex education. In conjunction with the Department of Health at the centre a program was devised to be delivered by the Ipswich Sexual Health Centre. Students are grouped in various categories. Intellectually Impaired students are given priority as a high needs group. Indigenous boys are also grouped together with both the teacher and the sexual health worker being indigenous. Although the program does teach the “nitty gritty’s”, the focus is very much about healthy relationships and healthy bodies. Students are taught through a variety of methods including power point presentations and group discussions. Case workers have also asked for the legal aspects of sex to be included in particular with Intellectually Impaired students.

Each week Keiran and his team from the Indigenous Urban Health Service come out and spend some time with a group of students. All of the students in this group are indigenous boys and the teacher is also indigenous. The program is designed to focus on health issues that affect indigenous boys including the awareness and prevention of chronic diseases. Students learn about the real dangers surrounding issues such as diabetes, smoking and alcohol amongst other things.
A short while ago, the girls were spending each Wednesday afternoon in a program called “story group”. This was a writing group aimed at increasing the students imaginations and story writing skills. Unfortunately it was also rather boring. Rather than drop the afternoon all together, a new program called “Girl Talk” was developed. The main aim is simply to get girls to talk about girl issues. The format changes every week. Sometimes the girls are given a topic and let go with it. Other weeks we may all give each other manicures or make an afternoon tea together. There are also a couple of guest speakers. Topics included are:

- Being a girl sucks sometimes
- What makes a good boyfriend
- Domestic Violence
- Looking Good
- Healthy Body
- Sexual Health
- Friendships
- Women We Admire

The girls are not censored in these sessions and can discuss anything they like with the obvious exceptions of talking about other people or disclosing information that would fall under mandatory reporting rules.

To give an example of how the program runs. For the topic “Being a girl sucks sometimes”, the girls were left to freely chat and each time the chat would start to peter out, another one of the statements you can see now was introduced leading to further conversation. Girls started a little slowly with the program but now enjoy coming and spending time in the sessions. The students themselves have come up with the idea of doing a deportment program for the final term of the year. They have fantastic ideas about their graduation day including getting new clothes and having a sit down dinner and dance.

Sports are vital to the wellbeing of the students. Student reports indicate that the sporting programs are the most popular programs in the school. Nearly all students participate in sport for a number of lessons per week. Both athletics and swimming carnivals are held each year as in any other school. Sections compete against each other with a section being able to be that years champions. Sports teachers provide for organised weekend sports matches with students entered into both a rugby union
and a soccer league. This involves competing against outside teams. Obviously all games are home games.

For a year now the school has had a partnership with the Beacon Foundation. The Beacon Foundation is a non-profit industry funded group whose focus is to connect young unemployed people and industry. The foundation has run a number of events at the school now, the most popular with the students being speed careering. A number of people who work in a variety of different settings and trades come along to the school and during one session rotate every 10 minutes through the classes of students. 10 minutes goes so quickly that the students don’t get bored at all but learn heaps. Another popular event was “Lunch with the Girls”. A whole day program with Nicohle and a team of mentors to work with the girls focuses on goal setting. The girls got to have pizza for lunch and formed a quick friendship with their mentors. Business lunches are designed to get industry to visit the centre, meet with the students and to form partnerships that will become useful for the next phase of the partnership.

Beacon’s Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) with the school is for 3 years. The next phase of the partnership is being planned. Funding for further programs has been applied for. The plan is to work closely with students who are long term and will be released in the next year or so. The idea is to take the students out for industry visits and have them try some work experience placements in a field that interests them. From there the hope is that some of these students would impress a potential employer enough that they could begin a school based traineeship or apprenticeship. This is the first detention setting school that Beacon has worked with, but if you are interested, I am sure they would be keen to have you chat with them about your own schools.

Particular indigenous programs are also highly acknowledged. Elders attend the centre on a weekly basis, providing support for our indigenous students. The school has a strong Closing the Gap committee which plan and provide cultural events such as the celebration of NAIDOC week as well as providing ongoing cultural lessons to students.

Although not a specific program like the other things I have talked about, I have still added Students with Disabilities (SWD) as a topic because I really feel that what we
do with these students at our school is making a difference. As I mentioned earlier our SWD population equates to about 20% of student numbers sometimes more, sometimes less. Intellectual Impairment far exceeds any other disability type, but we also have a significant population of Students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Hearing impairment and Speech Language Impairment. A large number of these students have come from a Special School setting in previous years however many of these students have not attended a school in years, so this gives us an excellent chance to see how they are doing and get any medical follow up that is required. Re-testing students to ensure that verifications are up to date is done wherever possible. On occasion a previous suspicion of a verifiable disability is able to be concluded within the centre, particularly in the area of Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

Students who are academically very low or have a disability that affects their academic or social ability in the classroom are in classes together with a special education teacher. Extra Teacher Aide support is provided in these classes and class work is heavily modified to suit each student’s Individual Education Plan. Students learn functional literacy and numeracy as well as social and living skills. A Stop, Think, Do program is incorporated into the classroom.

Special Education staff provides PD for teachers as well as in induction programs for new youth workers. Every fortnight the Student Support Services committee meet to discuss any student who is having issues in the school and a team works out the approach to best assist students who are struggling at school. Specialised support staff are available with our Speech Language Pathologist visiting the school twice per term, a guidance officer on site and full time AUSLAN interpreter for a young Deaf girl who has had many visits with us.

As I also mentioned earlier about 25% of our students are already “students in care”. Through the writing of Educational Support Plans for these students, funding (in Queensland at least) was successfully gained. This means that we employ an additional full time teacher aide whose sole job is to work with these students. Although her main job description is to assist with literacy and numeracy programs, a lot of her role is establishing a bond with these students and being able to assist them with any needs (eg timetable changes, friendship issues).