There is a growing trend by many international countries towards hybrid juvenile justice systems incorporating elements of both justice and welfare models (Murphy, 2010). In recent years juvenile justice systems in the majority of Australian states have undergone a paradigm shift moving away from a punitive approach. The new paradigm is on diversionary or preventative approaches combined in many instances with restorative or therapeutic practices. The challenge is in finding the most effective balance between these approaches whilst taking into consideration community perceptions, expectations and safety against the needs of the young offenders. The 2010 Review of Effective Practice in Juvenile Justice report supports the notion that to effectively address juvenile crime requires a whole-of-community approach involving government, the non-government sector and the community encompassing all required services because youth offending is often related to other problems that the juvenile justice system cannot address in isolation.

However, there will always be the need to incarcerate young people. Where incarceration is unavoidable Brisbane Youth Education and Training Centre (BYETC) recognises the importance of having robust and sustainable programs to assist young people to re-integrate into the community after release.

Brisbane Youth Education and Training Centre is an Education Queensland school staffed by Education Queensland teachers. The school operates wholly within the grounds of the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre (BYDC) facility located in the western suburbs of Brisbane. BYDC is a secure detention facility managed and operated by the Department of Communities for offenders who are either on remand or sentenced for criminal offences. The centre accommodates females from across the state and males from Rockhampton south to the border. Approximately 80% of the population are males and 50% identify as indigenous. On average 20% of BYETC enrolments are verified students consistent with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Intellectual Impairment disability category. Hearing Impairment and Speech Language Impairment disability
categories are also evident in the school’s population. The school is structured with a Middle School and a Senior School. The ratio of teachers to students is 1:6, teaching in purpose built facilities. Young people at BYDC attend school during regular school hours.

As an education and training centre governed by a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Communities the school prides itself in being able to operate as close as possible to a regular mainstream high school. The school plays an important role in the community through providing young people involved with crime the opportunity to gain knowledge, skills and attitudes which can enable them to take up more positive alternatives to criminality in their future lives. BYETC is a dedicated high school facilitating a specialised education and training curriculum tailored to the needs of young people in detention. The senior curriculum emphasises personal and social learning, literacy and numeracy, and vocational training.

Underpinning program delivery is the ethos of reconnecting the young person to society and supporting the positive development of the whole person. As an education and training facility we take seriously our commitment to providing learning opportunities for our young people. A major objective of the school is assisting young offenders in successfully transitioning into the community through the provision of a relevant and vocationally orientated education curriculum. The senior school curriculum offered to our 15 to 17 year old students comprises a wide range of vocational education and training (VET) certificate courses including VET literacy and numeracy courses, career education, personal development and externally sourced courses to suit individual needs. Students are able to choose their preferred course of study with consultation and advice available from the Head of Department Curriculum, teachers, Guidance Officer and their assigned case worker. The school also plays in local sporting competitions and boasts a wide range of partners providing specialised services.

The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs and Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) ‘National Blueprint for Career Development’ identifies the skills, attitudes and knowledge that individuals need to make sound choices and to effectively manage their career. In the Blueprint, DEEWR recommends young people need to engage in work experience opportunities, explore information on local employers and explore a variety of work
alternatives. DEEWR outlines the benefits of experiences in the workplace in helping to:

- Develop skills on the job
- Demonstrate abilities to potential employers
- Obtain references
- Secure/create and maintain work contacts
- Take part in structured training
- Stay connected to the workforce

In 2010, BYETC committed to a working partnership with the Beacon Foundation for a minimum of three years. This partnership is founded on the basis that students at BYETC mainly consist of young people who have a:

- History of non attendance in school or a disrupted education, so would benefit from opportunities to gain vocational qualifications;
- Generational history of unemployment, meaning students lack role models at home;
- Lack of motivation and/or future goals because they cannot see a positive future pathway;
- Low self-worth and self-esteem related to not having goal orientation;
- Likelihood of not furthering their education post detention due to lack of motivation or understanding of opportunities.

Additionally, a substantial population is from rural and remote communities who may not be aware of available career options.

Established 22 years ago the Beacon Foundation has a significant track record impacting the lives of young people. Beacon gives disadvantaged young people the opportunity to make a successful transition post school into further education, training or employment, ensuring welfare is seen purely as a safety net. BYETC is the only juvenile detention centre in Australia working with Beacon, using their expertise to connect students with local businesses, community organisations and their national business supporters. The challenge for Beacon is to adapt their programs designed for mainstream schools, through the adherence of restrictions and limitations imposed on young people in detention, while still drawing on their connections, providing young people with job skills, information and experiences in the workplace raising their aspirations, building their sense of self-worth and increasing their motivation to succeed.
The overarching goal of ‘Outside In – Inside Out’ is to address the needs, which are articulated in the foundation on which the partnership with Beacon is based, to ensure students are work ready so they become happy, productive, self-managing contributing members of the community.

Conceptualising and planning the ‘Outside In – Inside Out’ program identified four contributing goals of the partnership which underpin the overarching goal.

1. Provide students with job readiness skills, social skills and industry information in an engaging way;
2. Establish strong business relationships for the benefit of the students and school;
3. Provide off site opportunities for students;
4. Increase support of students through transition

Within the confines of the school, progress has already been made to provide students with job readiness skills, social skills and industry information through a variety of activities held on the school site. These have included:

- Two career workshops delivered in the format of ‘Speed Careering’
- ‘Lunch with the Girls Program’ (including self-awareness, social skills and goal setting)
- Enhanced career education approach
- Pro-active Career counselling

Future program activities, also adaptations of Beacon’s mainstream school programs, include:

- Polish
- Mock Interviews
- BBQ with the Boys
- Business Blackboard

Our partnership with Beacon and supported by the Department of Communities staff at BYDC aims to provide students nearing the end of detention with a program of socialisation, work experience and school based traineeships to enhance their chances of entering employment or tertiary study. The ‘Outside In – Inside Out’ program is dependent on businesses offering such opportunities. It is only natural that businesses will be hesitant to engage with a school with the characteristic of BYETC. The partnership with Beacon is the key in gaining support of businesses for the reintegration of selected students.
In November 2010 BYETC held a Business Launch, a component of the Beacon program. The event was an opportunity for BYETC to invite local businesses and community partners to find out about the school’s Beacon program and how they can become involved. ‘Outside In – Inside Out’ was successfully launched with the event attended by businesses and organisations eager to hear of the school’s new Beacon program and the opportunities to get involved. Another business event is being held this year in late October to celebrate a successful ‘NAB Schools First Seed Funding Award’ and to acknowledge the support of businesses and external organisations during the past year. It is also an opportunity for expanding local business interest and participation.

The next step is to address a significant need for these young people to have real life experiences of the workplace, to give them similar opportunities to their counterparts from high schools in the wider community. This will involve young offenders visiting work sites to increase their understanding of the opportunities available to them once they leave and to gain skills through certified vocational courses. Such community based experiences will provide young offenders with opportunities to remain integrated with society, develop community support, transition from detention back to society, as well as develop employment opportunities.

Recidivism rates in youth detention are high partly because the barriers experienced on leaving the institution prevent students returning to school or gaining employment. One of these barriers is that many students have strengths in the vocational area but have not been supported on exiting detention to gain employment. The Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian report *Views of Young People in Detention Centres, Queensland (2011)*, detailing the Commission’s survey on the views and experiences of young people in our state’s youth detention centres, indicated a large majority of young people “expressed a desire to pursue work, training and/or education after they leave detention” and that working was viewed “as central to reducing the likelihood of further offending”.

A high level of supervision of young people during activities held outside the school and the detention centre is required to maximise their chances of success and ongoing support for the ‘Outside In – Inside Out’ program. Ongoing supervision, monitoring and having in place support mechanisms once the young person has exited the detention centre is fundamental to reducing recidivism.
Wilkinson (2003) contends that preparing for an offender’s release from the beginning of their sentence, rather than the traditional practice of starting this preparation in the last few months of incarceration, leads to a “seamless transition of accountability and resources at the outset of one’s entry into the system through to the completion of any post-release supervision and beyond” (p. 1). Current transition (or reintegration) practices vary according to the length of a young person’s incarceration. Transition planning for long term detainees may include participation in the Community Assistance Program (CAP). CAP gives young people supervised access to the community where they can attend education, traineeships and work, job seeking and gain experience with activities essential to everyday living in the community. The Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian survey validates academic literature opinion that it would be desirable that all young people be involved in transition planning immediately after their admission to detention (Barton, 2006; Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, 2005) and aftercare programs might enhance young people’s engagement and result in better outcomes if greater attention is given to young people’s own goals and working with their strengths (Barton, 2006).

The Commission’s report commends the collaborative efforts of the Department of Communities, Department of Education and Training and Queensland Health in improving the programming in Queensland’s youth detention centres, however, it raises the issue that “any gains young people make through their participation in detention programs are likely to be short-lived unless they are reinforced in the community.” The report makes the recommendation that it is important that young people be provided with appropriate opportunities and support to continue the types of programs they commence in detention once they return to the community. Further, the Commission makes the quality improvement recommendation to extend access to offender-specific programs to all young people in detention or developing an alternative program for those on remand.

To ensure the sustainability and maintain a collaborative approach the relationship with Beacon was established with a Memorandum of Understanding that clearly outlines the governance under which the school and Beacon will function. An ‘in-school working team’ has been established consisting of teaching and non-teaching staff led by the Head of Department. The Department of Communities as a stakeholder in our Beacon partnership is central to the success of the program. Important and significant contributions to be made by the Department of Communities include logistical
assistance, resourcing of program related events, providing individual student support and Transition Officer support. It is recognised that all stakeholders need to have a consistent and collaborative approach; therefore, a steering committee has been established.

Through the alignment of education, vocational pathways and work experience with Beacon’s power in building strong and sustainable industry relationships young people can be inspired and motivated onto a positive pathway connecting with and being supported by the whole community.

References


