



WHITELION
courage to grow

EMPLOYMENT

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Employers' Information Pack

Background

The Whitelion Employment Program provides and seeks community support and encouragement for young people through generating employment opportunities for disadvantaged young people both in the Victorian Youth Justice System and the wider community.



These young people often have histories of family dysfunction, physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect, inadequate support networks and a lack of positive adult role models.

"Without work and decent income, there is a strong chance that they will continue to display the behaviours that resulted in contact with the justice system and subsequent incarceration," (Lemmon, 2001).

A job is one way of helping these people assimilate into society. It represents all that is terrifying to these young people including responsibility, accountability and, most of all, trusting people.

Whitelion plays a pivotal role in partnering willing employers and suitable young offenders or disadvantaged young people in the wider community. It assists young people to re-establish themselves in the community and gain control of their lives.

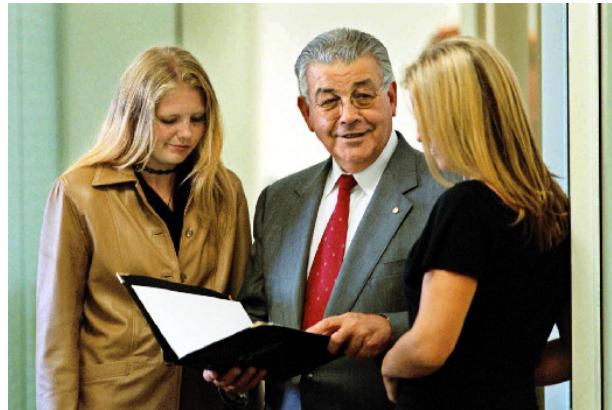
Young people who offend, often re-offend. A young offender has a heightened risk to grow up and become an adult offender. In many instances, young offenders return to the same environment and social circle that enabled and encouraged them to offend in the first place. Similarly disadvantaged young people can be persuaded to participate in risk taking or offending activities if they are not encouraged towards more positive connections.

A high level of support is needed to break this cycle of offending and risk. The relationships with employers involved in Whitelion's Employment Program can act as circuit breakers. Such positive connections are often the change these young people need, offering them the possibility of changing their lives.

Whitelion is the key organization addressing this issue within this particular group of highly marginalized young Australians and needs your support.

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Have you ever made a mistake? Have you been lucky enough to have someone offer you a hand when you were down? Then you will relate to the young people that Whitelion work with in the Youth Justice System or in the wider community. They have dreams, aspirations and goals like everybody. Their hopes just seem that little bit harder to achieve for them, and that much more unrealistic. None of them planned to end up where they have. A simple act of trust and a job could help get them back on track.



A senior Magistrate's view is that criminal sanctions don't work with social and health issues, and we have to try and use new ways to treat the problem. These lives have been damaged from an early age. The community needs to intervene, so we can offer hope, opportunity and self-respect.

Evaluation of Whitelion's employment work, in particular, (Miller, 2004:15) indicates that it has helped young people in many ways including;

- Improved feelings of worth
- Improved levels of confidence and independence
- Reduced reliance on drugs

A young person recently stated, “With a criminal record it's so hard to get a job! We're just kids with a problem and we're not all the same. I'm just looking for a chance!”

Testimonials from young people involved in the Employment Program

Nicole: “For the first time in my life I've been given a chance to really succeed and have a decent life. I went from having nothing and no hope, to having a great job.”

Cherrie: “Through work I've learnt skills that I never knew I had and it was great seeing my workmates trust me.”

Casey: “It gave me a lot of courage and let me have the willpower to be able to do it. There were hard times and there were good times.”

Lauren: “I felt nervous to start with and it was tough at first! I love it now. I've learnt to trust and be more open. I feel like one of the team and they trust me and rely on me. Now I want to get on with my life! You go out the door a number and they actually expect you to return! If there's no one to help us, we can become institutionalised. I've made a promise to myself to succeed.”

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Corriann: “It’s tough to get a job with a record and no experience. Without Whitelion support and with no real prospects, I wouldn’t have made it on my own. I needed to get a start.”

Angela: “I would like to thank you for your help and giving people like myself a chance to get back on our feet, and to gain experience in the work force.”

Anon: “I wanted to make it happen to get a job. But I didn’t have the confidence and the system doesn’t like people with criminal records. The Whitelion program helped and I’m so proud of what I’ve achieved. I can go on!”

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Some of these young people are still in the Youth Justice System. What does that mean?

A: Young people could still be serving their custodial sentence when they come to work for you. Approximately half way through their sentence, these young people may be transferred to a transitional community house, still under the supervision of the Parkville Youth Residential Centre staff. There, with the support of Whitelion, they are given the opportunity to assimilate, gain employment and set some positive foundation stones for their release.



Q: If I offer employment, what does that mean for my company?

A: The Employer – Employee relationship is exactly the same as with any other employee that you hire. They are an employee on your payroll and are covered by, and entitled to, all the benefits and regulations you would normally operate within.

Organisations who currently support Whitelion will tell you that sometimes the employment relationship does not always go smoothly, however Whitelion provides support to both the employer and the employee on an ongoing basis and will intervene when necessary. This is a lot harder than writing a cheque to a charity. But the benefit to you, your company, society and most important of all, to the young person’s life, is much greater.

Q: Why would I want to hire trouble? These kids have problems!

A: Yes, we are asking you to embrace these young people and give them an opportunity. If you don’t and we don’t, the alternative is that these kids stay on the ‘not so merry-go-round’. It’s true that these young people have committed an offence or offences that have been serious enough for the Courts to issue custodial sentences. The majority of these offences have been drug related. These young people have requested to participate in the Whitelion program because they want to work.

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Whitelion makes all participants in the Employment Program aware of the standards that they must meet in order to keep a job. Whitelion offers participants support via Pre-Employment Workshops to assist in preparing them for the employment experience. As employers you are asked to actively work with, and through, the early transition phase.

These young people are trying to break the cycle and they know that the focus is on them. They are not looking for trouble – they are trying to start over. With your help, they can.

Quote: “I wanted to make it happen to get a job. But I didn’t have the confidence and the system doesn’t like people with criminal records. The Whitelion program helped and I’m so proud of what I’ve achieved. I can go on!”

Question: Are these young people drug addicts?

A: Unfortunately a very high percentage of these young people are drug dependent. Some may be on a supervised Methadone program. You will be advised if they are. Professional case-specific support is given to those employers and young people.

Question: What do I tell the staff?



A: Key people will know that they are coming through the Youth Justice System and may have a history of drug dependence. What you tell staff is up to you. We suggest that you tell them that your company has decided to support an employment group, and that you’re giving a young person who’s having difficulty finding work a chance at work experience. Whitelion will help you with managing the communication of this in your workplace.

Question: I can’t baby-sit them. What if there is a problem?

A: This is where Whitelion comes into its own, guiding each person involved in order to break the cycle:

- They are an employee the same as anyone else. But the reality is that you will have to be flexible in the early days.
- A Mentor/Buddy system is advised at first to help them settle in. They will need someone to be there for them.
- Whitelion will be in regular contact with you and the employee. If you need support or assistance, ring us. We’re there to help.
- Some of these young people are from the Youth Justice System and as such, in the early days will be dropped off and picked up by a supervisor.

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- Remember that some of these young people have never had a job before and may lack confidence and self-esteem. With this in mind, monitor and work with them like any new staff member.

Question: What sort of work can we offer?

A: This is a big step for these young people. The Whitelion Employment Program is flexible to accommodate the needs of your business and the young people, e.g. you may consider an arrangement of 2/4 days per week for 5 hours per day. We're setting them up to succeed, not to fail. For example, they could do administration work, reception, warehouse work or counter sales. Let them build up to a level of confidence and responsibility. Employment can range from casual, part-time or full-time work.



Whitelion also values the opportunity to arrange work experience with our young people. During a period of several weeks, young people are paid at casual rates to gain skills and become familiar with a professional work environment.

Question: How reliable will they be?

A: There are no guarantees in life. The young person knows this is a big opportunity. They sign a pledge between themselves and Whitelion to stick with the job, the program, and to do their best. However it's a big adjustment. They may never have had a job before, and they will still be working through their issues. For a while you may have to be flexible, at times treating them differently to other employees. With your help, this program will continue to work and make a difference to these and other young people's lives.

These young people can really surprise you and themselves. Some will not make it for whatever reason. It's frustrating but not a failure. If it were easy, we wouldn't need your help.

Question: Are we obliged to take the person you want placed?

A: It's your company, your decision. If possible we suggest an informal meeting prior to the interview with Whitelion staff. The fit and the motivation have to be right on both sides.

These young people are not bad people. Some of them have huge potential with a strong will to learn and change their circumstances.

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Why help Whitelion and what does it mean for you?

This is an opportunity to give something very tangible back to the community and to make an impact in someone's life. You win some, and feel as if you have lost a few, when working with these young people. The reality is that you never lose. If you have offered an opportunity for work, been supportive, provided a young person with responsibility and respect, you have probably done more than anyone else has to date, even when they quit or don't show up. They'll remember what you did for them and hopefully give it another go if it doesn't work out the first time.



Businesses will benefit from their increased skills in managing work place diversity with the coaching and support from Whitelion. In a study (Miller, 2004) completed with KFC restaurant managers 100% said their patience had been developed through the Whitelion Employment program, 80% said their empathy and understanding had been developed.

Feedback from Current Employers

Extraordinary companies such as Bakers Delight, City West Water, KFC, Preston Motors, ANZ, Coles, Medibank, Australia Post, Metlink, National Australia Bank, Spotless, Salesforce PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Rhumbarallas, Bilfinger Berger Services, State Securities, VicHealth and many other generous employers are ongoing supporters of Whitelion's Employment Program.

KFC: "You have to want to do this and you need to show interest and support for these kids. In the stores that have supported this program, the staff turnover has dropped, as managers have learned new and more perceptive ways to deal with Whitelion employees and then transferred these methods to all staff."

KFC: "We've had two girls. The first one chose to leave. The second has been great and we want to put her on full time. She is as good as the best, a real team member! You have to have the buddy system in place. My whole attitude to judging people and giving them a go has changed. The program is great."

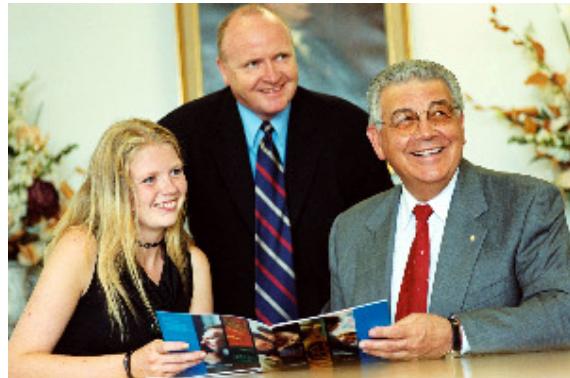
VicHealth: "We have had two girls. The first was not comfortable in her admin. role, but she learnt new skills and found a focus and a reason to get her life organised. The second needed lots of help, but was very grateful. She built her people skills and learned to ask for help! It was a positive experience for all."

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Baker's Delight: "This is a real grass roots contribution, with hands-on involvement. It's had a positive impact on the team, and on how people view things. These young people challenge you and take you out of your comfort zone. Some of the girls have been a delight. It's incredible what they have missed out on."

Preston Motors: "He had no self-esteem; no eye contact and no get-up and go. Yet in the workshop he became positive and gave it a real go!"

If you can make a difference for one kid, you have made a huge difference."



Whitelion Role Models and Mentors

A great many people help the young people in the Youth Justice System on the inside, by being role models and helping to inspire them to take control of their lives when they are released:

- Glenn Manton- Carlton Premiership Player;
- Tim Fleming- Richmond Football Club;
- Tania Doko- Bachelor Girl
- Jo Fox- Olympic Gold Medallist;
- Lisa O'Keefe- Olympian.

These are also many more wonderful sports persons, musicians, clubs and individuals who help to give these young people another chance.

The Whitelion Employment Program Coordinators provide on-going support to the young people and the employers involved in the program.

These are busy people. We're all busy people! They just know how important it is to give these kids support. **These kids are the future, so let's try and make it a positive one.**

Photos courtesy of VicHealth photographer Jerry Galea and Whitelion.

References

A. Lemmon, 2001; New Directions in working with young people in juvenile justice residential centres
Miller, L., 2004; Turning Lives Around: Whitelion / KFC Corporate Relationship