

Office for Children, Department of Human Services  
*Evaluation of the Ramp Mentoring Program*

**FINAL REPORT**



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ramp is a personal development and mentoring program specifically designed to meet the needs of high-risk young people aged 13 to 17 years in residential care in the Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR) of Melbourne. It was established by Whitelion Inc and the Reach Foundation and funded as a pilot project by the Office for Children, Department of Human Services (DHS) from February 2005.

In June 2007, DHS contracted the Nucleus Consulting Group to undertake an evaluation of Ramp. The main purpose of the evaluation was to identify and assess the effectiveness and efficiency of Ramp in regard to outcomes and impact and to determine whether the broader program objectives were being met.

The evaluation was informed by quantitative and qualitative data from program management, young people participating in the program, Ramp staff, mentors, residential care staff and DHS protective workers. There were a number of limitations to the evaluation including the low response rates of residential care staff and DHS protective workers, which is in part a reflection of high staff turnover and caseloads. Obtaining interviews with young people participating in Ramp also proved challenging and reflected the complexity of working with this group.

Ramp participants had high and complex needs - of the 64 young people who participated in some way with the Ramp program over 80% were or have been considered to be at high risk by DHS. Just under half were considered to be abusing alcohol, drugs or other substances, and over a third had Youth Justice involvement. Nearly one quarter of participants had been in care for six years or more.

Ramp is unlike other mentoring programs in Victoria as it incorporates additional features - lead mentors to visit residential care units and engage young people, workshops, camps and other activities. These features provide an integrated approach and are essential strategies in conducting an effective program for young people in this target group. The evaluation also found that the Ramp model incorporated features of effective mentoring programs as shown in relevant research.

The Ramp strategies have the added benefit of providing young people with a range of positive role models as well as multiple layers of support (from other young people, some of whom are outside the residential care system, Ramp staff, the Reach Crew, other adults, and mentors should they choose to be matched). Not all participants want a mentor, at least not initially, and Ramp provides a way for these young people to also participate and achieve some positive change as well.

Ramp is more expensive than some other mentoring programs due to the inclusion of lead mentors and workshops, a camp and associated activities in the service model. However, it is these elements that facilitate the engagement of high-risk young people and that contribute to sustained, beneficial mentoring relationships.

Communication between Ramp and DHS protective workers was found to be poor and action is recommended to remedy this situation. Relationships between Ramp and residential care staff were variable due often to high turnover of staff. Where there was a positive relationship, residential care staff worked in a highly complementary way with Ramp, promoting the program to residents and supporting achievements. Good communication between all parties is essential for working effectively with young people.

Ramp activities were generally well attended with most of those interviewed believing they were fun and provided a safe and inclusive environment where they could meet new people and make friends. The evaluation demonstrated that Ramp provided a diverse range of activities for young people, particularly those with mentors. Comments from young people participating in Ramp indicated that Ramp provided a stimulating and inspiring experience.

A number of factors have been identified that encouraged engagement with Ramp. Matches are carefully considered and given time to develop, including an initial trial and ongoing assessment to ensure both parties are committed. Most matches continue for the mandated 12 months and many go even longer. Young people are mostly very positive about the relationship with their mentor. Mentors spend time with their mentee weekly or fortnightly in a wide range of activities, are very dedicated and work hard at their relationship. Based on length of relationship, observed and reported impact, and general satisfaction amongst both mentors and mentees, the great majority of Ramp matches were found to have been successful. Ramp exceeded targets established in its 2006/07 DHS Funding and Service Agreement.

Ramp staff, mentors, residential care workers and the young people themselves all indicated that participants seemed to be more self-aware and had better self-esteem and confidence as a result of participation in the program. Comments from mentors and participants demonstrated that participants also had improved interpersonal and communication skills. Participants were better placed to take responsibility for and control their future than they were prior to entering the program. Many had new, more positive social connections and some were actively working towards more positive life goals. However, for many, given their complex backgrounds, these gains must be regarded as early (but significant) steps in a long journey.

A number of the young people involved in Ramp reported to have achieved some important changes in their lives; most believed these changes were a result of participating in Ramp. The Ramp service model embodies a number of significant strengths and this evaluation has demonstrated many positive effects and substantial promise, including the possibility that it will produce long-term savings and benefits to the community through successful intervention in the lives of high risk, difficult to engage young people.

In summary the Ramp model appears to have had a positive impact on most of the young people who engaged with the program. The unique elements of the program, such as the 'lead mentors', workshops and camps are deserving of further investigation by DHS in the development of mentoring service models.

# INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

Ramp is a mentoring program for young people who are child protection clients and in residential care in the Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR) of Melbourne. It was established by Whitelion Inc and the Reach Foundation and funded as a pilot project from 1 March 2004 by the then Department of Human Services, Office for Children. Funding by DHS continued over the 2005/2006 and 2006/2007 financial years, with funding extended from 1 July 2007 to 31 March 2008.

Ramp is a 'personal development and mentoring' program specifically designed to meet the needs of high risk young people aged 13 to 17 years in residential care facilities in EMR.

The overall aim of Ramp is 'to engage at risk young people ... in voluntary relationships with adult mentors combined with peer/group experiences, in order to support their positive behaviours and their capacity to manage their lives'.<sup>1</sup>

The program differs from other mentoring program in a number of ways. Ramp targets often younger people in residential care, deemed to be a higher level of risk. Ramp is also structured differently to many other mentoring programs; it includes additional components such as group activities and lead mentors visiting residential units on a regular basis to engage young people in the program. In addition, not all young people participating in Ramp necessarily need to be matched with a mentor.

The program seeks to:

- Improve the social connectedness of young people, including their engagement with mentors and their participation in positive social and recreational activities.
- Increase the self-confidence, self-esteem and optimism of young people.
- Improve young people's skills in relating to people, agencies and key others who have the capacity to assist them to achieve their goals.
- Improve young people's motivation and preparation to (re)engage with education, training and/or employment.

In June 2007, DHS contracted the Nucleus Consulting Group to undertake an evaluation of Ramp. The purpose of the evaluation was to:

- Identify and assess the effectiveness and efficiency of Ramp in regard to outcomes and impact.
- Determine whether the broader program objectives are being met.
- Provide feedback to DHS and Ramp on any impediments or ways of improving the delivery of the program.
- Inform decisions regarding future funding of the program.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Office for Children, DHS, Request for Quotation

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

## METHODOLOGY

Initially, Nucleus facilitated a workshop with Ramp staff to develop a *Program Logic Model*, encompassing program inputs, outputs and impact.

Based on the DHS Project Brief and the Program Logic, an *Evaluation Framework* was then developed (see Attachment 1). The Framework describes the evaluation questions for objective of the Ramp program, provides indicators and data sources, and was used to direct research within the project including consultations with key stakeholders. The Framework was considered and endorsed by the Project Steering Committee.

Detailed project methodology and data collection instruments were developed based on the Evaluation Framework and provided to the Project Steering Committee for comment prior to submission to the DHS Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC); approval to proceed was provided by the DHS HREC in September 2007.

Qualitative data was collected from five groups – Ramp staff, mentors, residential care staff, DHS protective workers and Ramp participants. Data was collected over a one month period in October 2007.

As many of the young people were under 18 years of age, consent to participate was required from parents and/or guardians (which, under HREC requirements, was to be obtained by DHS). Overall, the evaluation aimed to have 30 Ramp participants contributing to the evaluation. In order to achieve the sample, 43 letters were sent to parents and guardians enclosing project information and consent forms<sup>3</sup>. Of these, 28 responded positively with completed consent forms and one refused. No follow up of non-respondents was undertaken by DHS given the short timeframe within which the project had to be completed.

Once parental/guardian consent was received, Nucleus contacted the residential care units where Ramp participants lived. A Project Information Sheet was prepared by Nucleus to inform stakeholders of the evaluation and request their cooperation with surveys and/or focus groups. Significant parts of the project were facilitated by DHS EMR including the circulation of information regarding the review to Community Service Organisations (CSO) that auspiced a residential unit involved in Ramp. Unfortunately, as the project progressed, residential care staff often appeared unaware of the evaluation when contacted by Nucleus, resulting in delays.

When meetings with young people participating in Ramp could be arranged, their personal consent to participate in the evaluation was also acquired. In the majority of situations, a detailed interview with the young person followed immediately after consent was obtained. However, for many, this was an extremely challenging process. The young people were difficult to catch on the telephone to arrange a meeting time, follow through appointments were often not kept, and they were hard to engage in conversation. Some absconded from their units and a number of interviews needed to be completed on an 'impromptu' basis.

Where they could be obtained, interviews were conducted according to a standard format<sup>4</sup> and held where the young person resided (i.e. residential care unit, adolescent community placement or family home), at the Melbourne Youth Justice Centre or at some other mutually agreed place.

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<sup>3</sup> See submission to DHS Human Research Ethics Committee, August 2007

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

## YOUNG PEOPLE

The table below provides details on recruitment activities and outcomes:

Recruitment Activity	Number
Letters sent by DHS to parents/guardians of all young people listed as involved in Ramp	43
Parents/guardians agree to participate	28
Young people refused to participate	3
Young people not followed up on basis of DHS advice (given the young person's current situation)	3
Young people not followed up on basis previously known to Nucleus	1
Unable to contact (moved/absconded)	2
Unable to complete interview (repeated attempts made)	3
Participants interviewed	16

Sixteen (16) young people were successfully interviewed (57% of the sample provided), of whom 10 were male and six were female. Ten were currently matched with an individual mentor, three had graduated matches (i.e. a match that had successfully concluded) and three were unmatched. Over half of all Ramp matches (54%), as defined, were captured in this sample.

### DHS CASE MANAGERS

The evaluation also involved surveys<sup>5</sup> of DHS protective workers and the mentors of young people for whom consents were held, in order to obtain a broad range of views of changes in Ramp participants since their engagement with Ramp.

DHS advised that 13 protective workers held case management responsibility for current Ramp participants (six Ramp participants no longer had a DHS protective worker). Of these, eight workers were involved with one or more of the 16 young people interviewed. All eight were sent a survey and four responded with a completed survey (50%) covering at least 11 Ramp participants. One worker was unsure how many young people of her caseload were involved with Ramp. Numerous reminders were sent to non-respondents and the Project Steering Committee was also engaged in trying to increase response rates.

### RAMP MENTORS AND STAFF

Surveys were sent to all mentors (10) involved in a current match with one of the 16 young people interviewed plus one mentor of a graduated match. Seven surveys were completed and returned. Due to concerns about the number of responses, it was subsequently decided to survey all Ramp mentors whether they had involvement with one of the 16 young people or not, and whether or not they had a match. This produced an additional eight responses, for a total of 18 of 38 mentors (47%) or 60% of those that had or were currently in a match with a young person.

A focus group of eight Ramp staff was held to discuss views on the program and impact it had on participants.

<sup>5</sup> See submission to DHS Human Research Ethics Committee, August 2007

## RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

Residential care staff were also surveyed<sup>6</sup> on perceived changes in Ramp participants and general collaboration with Ramp. Nucleus contacted the auspices of the residential care units to obtain names and contact details of staff in the units who were likely to know the residents well. Thirteen staff in 11 residential units were sent surveys, with three returned (23%). A reminder was sent to all contact people.

## CASE STUDIES

A profile of Ramp participants was created from an audit of DHS files (35) of known Ramp participants. Ramp provided a profile of their mentors. Under Ethics Committee requirements, these reviews had to be conducted by DHS and Ramp respectively.

Three case studies were prepared to enrich appreciation of the type of young people engaged in Ramp and the impact of the program on their lives. Case studies were based on interviews with Ramp participants conducted by the consultants, with additional information from DHS, mentors and residential care staff. Some details in the case studies have been changed to preserve the privacy of subjects.

Financial data for Ramp and other mentoring programs operated by Whitelion (to enable a comparison between programs) was provided by Whitelion.

A Project Steering Committee oversaw design and implementation of the evaluation Workplan. The Steering Committee comprised representatives from the Office for Children, DHS EMR, Reach and Whitelion.

## LIMITATIONS

The evaluation team aimed to complete interviews with 30 young people participating in Ramp. It was correctly anticipated that it would be difficult to obtain interviews from young people, so DHS was asked to seek consent to participate from the parents/guardians of all the young people involved in the program. DHS was able to supply 28 consents and, as indicated in the previous section, 16 of these were successfully interviewed.

A number of young people for whom consents were held had to be omitted from the evaluation for various reasons, but for the remainder every possible attempt was made to locate, meet with and complete an interview.

There was a poor response to surveys of residential care workers and a limited response from DHS protective workers. At the outset, the most likely way to maximise responses from these groups was thought to be through the provision of information about the evaluation and then by working through their line management. While this remains our view, in this case there was some breakdown in that process attributable to:

- Written surveys proving to be an unsuccessful strategy for DHS case managers dealing with heavily crowded workdays and frequent case crises.
- Lack of engagement of residential care workers caused by barriers in communication with CSO auspices and unit staff themselves.
- Staff turnover or absences (within DHS and residential care units) at a number of critical points in the evaluation process.
- HREC requirements meaning that DHS EMR was asked to undertake more of the data collection/response coordination that it might have been prepared for.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

Some groups who may have had an important perspective to add to the evaluation were not canvassed:

- Carers of young people in Adolescent Community Placements who had been in residential care.
- The views of young people who elected not to get involved in Ramp, or those who became involved but did not continue

The evaluation sought, in part, information related to outcomes achieved by program participants (e.g. self-esteem; community connectedness; motivation and preparation to engage with education, training and/or employment). While this report provides such information, it is limited to the extent that the program has only been in existence for three years and many young people have been involved for significantly shorter times.

The young people participating in Ramp generally come from families with a range of complex issues that may take many years to work through and resolve; there will be 'wins' and 'losses' along the way. While this evaluation has demonstrated some very positive short-term impacts attributable to Ramp, a longitudinal study would be necessary to determine longer-term outcomes.

## **Recommendations**

1. Future DHS projects requiring client access and data should:
  - include the requirement of HREC approval in the project brief;
  - take into consideration the proposed contributions to data collection and its coordination from other parties; and
  - ensure that involvement by all stakeholders is understood and agreed upon.
2. Investigate opportunities for a longitudinal study of outcomes achieved by Ramp participants.

# PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

## BACKGROUND TO RAMP

In late 2004 the then Victorian Minister for Community Services approached the Reach Foundation and Whitelion Inc asking them to conduct a program for 'at risk' young people in residential care in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. As a result, Reach and Whitelion formed a partnership and were funded by DHS to conduct Ramp as a pilot project.

Reach is a Victorian based non-profit organisation established in 1994 to work on 'creating safe spaces and a positive peer group experience for young people. Reach provides an environment where they can develop trust and openness, where they feel comfortable enough to express their concerns, to discuss their aspirations and to recognise that they are not alone.... Reach seeks to build young people's confidence and self-esteem, in order to prevent negative emotions and destructive behaviours'.<sup>7</sup> Reach has a unique philosophy and way of working with young people, focusing on empowering and inspiring them, developing resilience and providing a sense of belonging. It works on young people inspiring young people: Reach has a 'crew' of young leaders who are trained in facilitation and inspiring other young people. Reach uses mediums of youth culture, such as music, film, comedy and dance, to connect and engage young people.

Whitelion was established in 1999 to support young people in the Youth Justice and Child Protection systems 'to build better lives for themselves and help make our community a more inclusive and safer place. Whitelion gives young people the best chance to break negative cycles through positive role modeling, mentoring and employment, and the opportunity to build positive lives as part of our community'.<sup>8</sup>

Ramp was designed to include a 'proven model of one-on-one and group mentoring relationships with positive role models, vocational and employment support, inspirational Reach camps and courses, and access to other Reach and Whitelion programs. These elements will be combined to engage the young people in a creative and varied way designed to overcome their disengagement and marginalisation and divert them from further involvement with the welfare and justice systems'.<sup>9</sup>

Ramp sought to combine the strengths of the two partner organisations – Whitelion's experience in mentoring and Reach's expertise in workshops and camps. The two agencies also proposed to work in partnership with other agencies and workers responsible for young people's case management to ensure that the program was well coordinated within the formal case management structure.

### Key Findings

- ❖ Ramp is a partnership of the Reach Foundation and Whitelion. Both bring special expertise to Ramp: Whitelion in mentoring and Reach in conducting workshops and related activities.

<sup>7</sup> The Reach Foundation Website: *About Reach*

<sup>8</sup> Whitelion Website: *FAQs*

<sup>9</sup> Residential Care Mentoring Program Whitelion/Reach Partnership, Proposal for Funding

## MENTORING PROGRAMS – A BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

Mentoring programs have been established both nationally and internationally in the welfare, youth justice, education and business sectors. In Victoria, mentoring programs are funded by government departments, the private sector and through public or philanthropic donation.

In the literature, mentoring for young people has been described in various ways: as a nurturing process in which one or more skilled or experienced persons serves as a role model to teach, sponsor, encourage, counsel, and befriend a less skilled person (Fowler, 2000); a one-on-one relationship between a pair of unrelated individuals, one adult and one juvenile, which takes place on a regular basis over an extended period of time (Hamilton, 1990); and carefully screened adult volunteers matched with a young person, with the goal of developing a friendship (Delaney and Milne, 2002).

Wilczynski (2004) describes mentoring as when a more experienced person takes on a role advising a less experienced person. It involves trust and friendship; it does not replace parent or counsellor or teacher roles in the young person's life, but is someone a young person can confide in and bounce ideas off.

The Department of Planning and Community Development's (DPCD) *Framework on Mentoring Young People* states that 'there is a growing body of evidence that indicates that the development of 'good' social behaviours in young people occurs when they are in supportive and consistent environments, where standards of behaviour are clear and they have strong bonds to their families, schools, communities and peer groups.

Research shows that a child living in a high-risk environment can be protected from adverse behaviour by a strong positive relationship with an adult who cares about them and is committed to their healthy development (2005).

Grossman and Tierney (1995), Sherman, et al (1996), McDonald et al (1997), Fuller (1988), and Delaney and Milne (2002) also found positive results from mentoring programs on young people.

MacCallum and Beltman (2002) showed that effective mentoring programs had:

- Collaborative links with parents, communities and other agencies.
- Careful selection and close monitoring of mentor-participant relationships.
- Provision of training, assistance and support for mentors.
- Flexibility in program implementation so that young people's needs can be met, and provision for ongoing participant feedback.
- A safe and supportive environment.
- A focus on purposeful activity with independence as a goal.
- Ongoing commitment from mentors and funding bodies.

DuBois et al (2002) revealed that ongoing mentor training, structured activities, expectations of frequency of contact, support for mentors, involvement of parents and program monitoring were predictors of positive outcomes for mentoring programs. Grossman and Rhodes (2002) found that the duration of mentor and participant relationships was a significant predictor of positive outcomes.

Roberts et al (2004) and Dubois (2002) established that short-term mentoring or mentoring that breaks down can increase harm for young people, while Lucas and Liabo (2003) found that there was no significant positive effect for mentor-mentee relationships that lasted less than six months and that if they lasted less than three months young people showed a significant decline in self-worth and academic abilities.

Delaney and Milne (2002) found that for young offenders mentoring could be an effective intervention where it was one element of a strategy. Pre-match activities for referred young people waiting to be matched and group activities to support matches were considered important; group activities that provided opportunities for socialising, fun and games in a safe and supportive environment were highly valued by participants and mentors alike.

Unpublished research relating to a number of different mentoring programs operating in Victoria<sup>10</sup> found that:

- Many young people were not comfortable with the concept of immediate matching with a volunteer, and that an engagement phase (a 'getting to know you' stage where volunteers offered general support through a range of 'introductory' activities) was often of critical importance.
- For disadvantaged young people, the provision of a range of less formal activities that provided a safe, supportive environment, helped to develop naturally formed relationships between young people and volunteers as the basis for the later establishment of more formal mentoring matches.
- Initially, for hard to engage young people, relationships between volunteers and young people appeared to develop more naturally in a group setting.

Wilczynski (2003) indicated there was little evidence of the long-term impact of mentoring programs. In the short term there was a reduction in re-offending for youth offenders, a reduction in offending behaviour, and completion of juvenile justice orders; and in mentoring programs in general, reduced substance misuse and other risky behaviours and increased participation in education, training and employment. Moodie (2005) concluded that even small reductions in the prevalence of high risk behaviour could be considered cost effective as the lifetime cost estimates for a young person disengaging from school, using drugs and embarking on a criminal career are large.

Research indicates many positive effects of mentoring, however there has been little investigation of the long-term effects. The research also shows that short-term relationships between young people and mentors can have a negative effect on offending and substance abuse. Wilczynski (2002) concluded that we couldn't confidently draw any conclusions about the effectiveness of mentoring in Australia and whether it reduces recidivism, but that it remains a 'promising' approach as an effective strategy for intervening with young people.

### Key Findings

- ❖ Research indicates many positive effects of mentoring and substantial promise, but to date there has been little investigation of long term effects.
- ❖ The Ramp program model incorporates features of effective mentoring programs as established in relevant research.

<sup>10</sup> Nucleus Consulting Group for Big Brothers Big Sisters Victoria (2005, 2007)

## RAMP TARGET GROUP

The target group for Ramp is young people aged 13 to 17 years residing in residential care units in the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne.

Eleven residential care units participate in Ramp, auspiced by Wesley Youth Services, EastCare Salvation Army, Waverley Emergency Adolescent Care (WEAC) and CARA Inc. In addition, some Ramp participants reside in Adolescent Community Placements (ACP).

Since the commencement of Ramp, 64<sup>11</sup> young people have participated in the program. De-identified data was provided by DHS for 35 Ramp participants, which has been used to build a profile of participants, as show in the following tables.

DHS data did not indicate that any of the 35 files reviewed showed Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds (but this may not be true of all program participants). Just over half of all Ramp participants are male (56%).

Age of Ramp participants ranges from 13 to 19 years, with most aged 15, 16 or 17:

Age	% of Participants*
13	3%
14	6%
15	24%
16	24%
17	34%
18	6%
19	3%

\* Based on sample of 35 young people provided by DHS

The average length of time that young people have been in care varies:

Length of Time in Care	Participants*
Less than 1 year	12%
1 year	12%
2 years	18%
3 years	18%
4 years	12%
5 years	9%
6 years or more	24%

\* Based on sample of 35 young people provided by DHS

40% of Ramp participants have had no previous involvement with Youth Justice, but nearly as many (37%) have. (Status with respect to Youth Justice was unknown or not reported for the remaining 23%).

<sup>11</sup> There is some discrepancy in number of program participants between Ramp reports and DHS files that could not be reconciled within this project, likely due to differences in definitions of 'participation' and intervals in updating DHS files.

Usually, participants were placed in care for a combination of reasons, most commonly high-risk activities, exposure to domestic violence or rejection by parents (often due to the challenging behaviours of the young person). The following table lists most common protective concerns:

Protective Concern	Participants*
Neglect (inc physical and emotional)	7
Abuse (inc physical and sexual)	11
Rejected by parents	12
High-risk activities	15
Sexual exploitation	1
Substance misuse	6
Abandonment	5
Exposure to a psychiatric illness	4
Transience	2
Exposure to conflict, domestic violence	15

\* Based on sample of 35 young people provided by DHS, but noting that a young person may have a number of different protective concerns

Of the 64 young people that have engaged with Ramp, 45% (29) are currently on the High Risk Register and 37% (24) have been in the past, indicating a very high proportion of young people with challenging behaviours or situations in their lives. Of the 35 Ramp participants whose files were audited by DHS as part of the evaluation, a combination of behaviours were noted:

- 46% (16) abused alcohol, drugs or other substances.
- 34% (12) exhibited violent and aggressive and criminal activity.
- 20% (7) abscond from their placement.
- 14% (5) had psychiatric issues (eg self-harming, psychosis, suicide attempts).
- 34% (12) are reported to be calm and settled at home or placement.
- 8% (3) are reported to have improved in their behaviour.
- 8% (3) are reported to have plans for the future.
- 43% (15) were currently attending school or another training program and 6% (2) were working or undertaking voluntary work.

## Key Findings

- ❖ Ramp is providing services to the intended target group: at risk young people aged 13 to 17 years residing in residential care in eastern Melbourne.
- ❖ Most have been in care for significant periods, mainly because of high-risk activities and/or exposure to domestic violence and conflict. Most are (or have been) on the DHS High Risk Register and had Youth Justice involvement. Just under half are considered to be currently abusing alcohol, drugs or other substances, and about a third are not involved in school, training program or other structured day activities.

## RAMP PROGRAM COMPONENTS – CORE STRATEGIES

Ramp consists of three main components – visits by lead mentors to selected residential units, experiential workshops and camps, and one-to-one mentoring relationships between mentors and young people (mentees). Engagement with Ramp by a young person may involve participation in one or more of these activities. A *Program Logic* model for Ramp is provided over the page.

### LEAD MENTORS

Lead mentors, employed by Ramp, visit the residential care units fortnightly to engage young people and staff in the program. The five lead mentors also visit young people in lead tenant houses, in secure welfare and young people from the units that are the Melbourne Youth Justice Centre.

Lead mentors identify young people they think may benefit from Ramp and, should they be interested, request a referral to Ramp from the DHS protective worker. Lead mentors also introduce unmatched mentors to young people, encourage them to attend Ramp activities or take them out on shopping, sporting or other activities; they may also refer them to other programs where appropriate.

### WORKSHOPS AND CAMPS

Reach conducts bi-monthly *Connections Workshops* for Ramp participants, facilitated by the Reach Crew; matched and unmatched mentors, lead mentors and Ramp staff also attend. The workshops are experiential and help to create bonds between participants and provide opportunity for Ramp participants to meet potential mentors. Workshops combine fun and awareness raising activities and assist in providing a sense of community.

An annual three-day camp is held for Ramp participants, also facilitated by the Reach Crew and attended by mentors, Ramp staff and lead mentors. Camps provide an opportunity to create and build on relationships from the workshops. Accounts from staff, mentors and young people indicate camps can provide positive and powerful experiences for Ramp participants, and build the sense of community.

Other group activities are organised for Ramp participants and mentors so that they can mix and potentially be matched outside the workshops. These activities include sporting events, concerts, visits to Luna Park, etc.

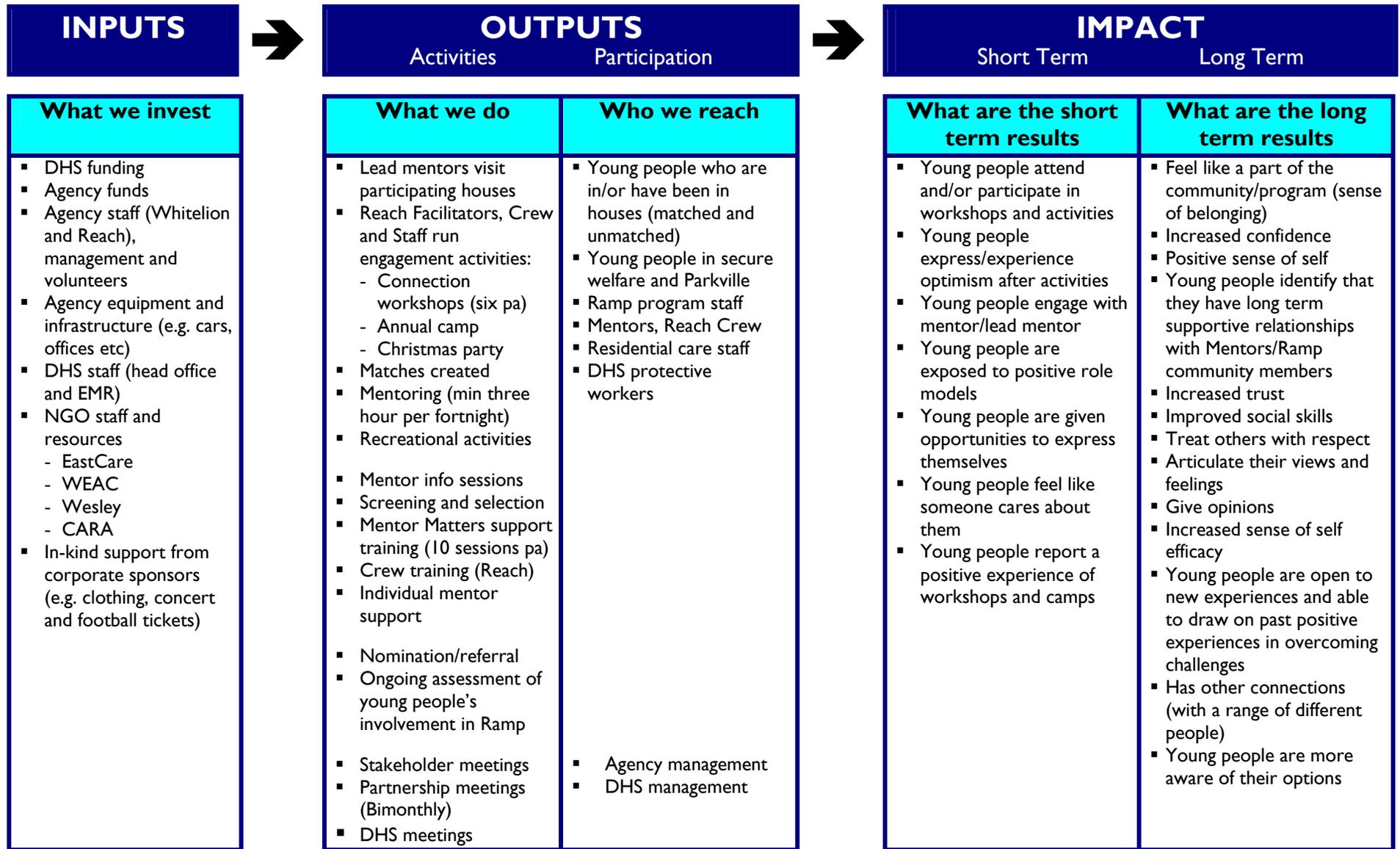
### ONE-TO-ONE MENTORING

Mentors are selected, trained, supported and matched with a Ramp participant. Mentors may not be matched immediately but attend and participate in Ramp activities and through these seek to develop relationships with Ramp participants. Matches are initially tested for three months where the young person and mentor undertake activities together on a trial basis before formalising their match. If both wish to continue a match it is formalised by signing a one-year contract. Mentors are expected to meet with their mentee at least fortnightly throughout this time.

#### Key Findings

- ❖ Ramp's key strategies include visits to residential care units by lead mentors; workshops, camps and other activities; and one-to-one mentoring of a young person.
- ❖ 'Engagement' with Ramp provides young people with a range of new contacts and influences, which may (but does not necessarily) include a one-to-one relationship with a mentor.

# PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL



## RAMP'S DIFFERENT STRATEGIES

The three strategies (lead mentors, workshops and camps, and one-to-one mentoring) provide an integrated approach to working with young people.

### MENTORING AND AT-RISK YOUNG PEOPLE

Delaney and Milne (2002) found that mentoring for young offenders was an effective intervention where it was one element of a strategy. Pre-match activities for young people waiting to be matched and group activities to support matches were considered important. Findings by Nucleus Consulting Group for Big Brothers Big Sisters Victoria also found that an engagement phase, less formal activities and group settings were important to the success of mentoring programs for hard to engage young people.

From information collected during this evaluation (presented later in this report) and review of evidence within the literature, it appears that the one-to-one mentoring relationship is the most effective strategy in bringing about change in participants. However, without engagement by lead mentors and participation in workshops and other activities, it is unlikely that matches with this target group would develop.

Ramp staff reported that many young people within the target group have issues in relation to trust and do not or are unable to develop relationships. As a result, a number of young people initially refuse to have a mentor. Ramp has demonstrated however that a number of these people change their minds after having attended workshops and other activities where they can meet, mix with and get to know prospective mentors.

Others however will not change their minds and continue to indicate they do not want a mentor. One of the key strengths of Ramp is that this group is not then excluded from the program, as occurs in mentoring programs based around one-to-one mentoring alone.

### WORKSHOPS AND CAMPS

At Ramp, through the continuing provision of workshops and activities, these young people are provided with ongoing opportunities to develop relationships with a variety of other people, including many people they would not otherwise interact with. Workshops and activities provide an avenue for young people to meet with other young people, not all of who are in residential care; mentors also attend and participate in activities.

A number of participants talked of the value to them of attending workshops - learning to talk with and in front of others, having fun in a safe environment, etc. Ramp staff pointed to a range of significant changes achieved by young people during or after attending a program activity; some of these changes were also observed later by protective workers and residential care staff.

The lead mentor visits are seen by Ramp as essential in engaging young people in the program, and camps, workshops and other activities are seen as an important ingredient in encouraging young people to meet and agree to have a mentor. Lead mentors play a critical part in the process, engaging young people within the residential care unit, encouraging them to attend workshops and other activities (sometimes driving the young people to activities), introducing potential mentors and working with residential staff to encourage them to promote the program and involve residents in Ramp. Ramp reports that it may take many months for a lead mentor to gain the trust and acceptance of young people in residential care and that the role is difficult but essential to the success of the program.

Relative strengths of each of Ramp’s three core strategies are shown in the table over the page (discussion and justification for these conclusions is presented later in the report):

Strategy	Relative Strengths
Lead mentors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Engage young people where they currently live</li> <li>▪ Form relationships and build trust with residents</li> <li>▪ Encourage young people to attend Ramp activities</li> <li>▪ Introduce potential mentors</li> <li>▪ Work with residential care staff to promote Ramp</li> <li>▪ Ensure nominations are completed by DHS</li> </ul>
Workshops and camps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide a safe environment</li> <li>▪ Provide a setting where participants can learn about themselves and have some fun in the process</li> <li>▪ Provide a venue for participants to meet and develop relationships with other young people, potential mentors and other positive role models</li> </ul>
One-to-one mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Enable young people to develop trusting relationships with another person</li> <li>▪ Enable young people to have positive role models</li> <li>▪ Enable young people to engage in a range of other activities and experiences</li> <li>▪ Assist young people to make changes in their lives</li> </ul>

Ramp shows that a proactive approach is necessary to encourage many high-risk young people in residential care to become involved in a program. Without the three key strategies, operating in a coordinated and integrated fashion, it is unlikely that an effective mentoring program for this target group would be the result.

<b>Key Findings</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Ramp provides an integrated approach (lead mentors, workshops/camps and mentoring) to working with young people, with any one strategy in isolation being unlikely to produce the results of the integrated approach. Without the three core strategies, it is unlikely that Ramp would be an effective mentoring program for this target group.</li> <li>❖ Not all young people want or are ready for a one-to-one relationship. Unlike many other mentoring programs, Ramp caters for this group of young people.</li> </ul>

## OTHER PROGRAM STRENGTHS

Aspects of the way the three core strategies are operationalised, combined with features of program structure, produce in Ramp a number of intrinsic strengths (rationale for these conclusions is drawn from evidence and discussion contained in other sections of this report):

### PARTNERSHIP

According to Ramp staff, one of the strengths of the program is the partnership between Reach and Whitelion. Reach specialises in engaging and developing young people, while Whitelion specialises in mentoring programs. By combining the two, Ramp provides more opportunities for engagement with young people.

Some young people enter the program with the view that they do not want a mentor, however, over time, this view has been shown to frequently change. With time and engagement, young people start developing trust and relationships, meet potential mentors and often decide they want to be in a mentoring relationship. For those who still do not wish to have a mentor, the other Ramp activities provide ongoing opportunities for engagement, relationship development, a sense of community, building confidence and resilience.

### THE RAMP COMMUNITY

Ramp staff and participants talk of the Ramp 'community'. The activities and style of engagement mean that Ramp participants meet not only with their mentor, as in other mentoring programs, but also have the opportunity to develop relationships with other participants, program staff and mentors, including other young people who are not in residential care. This is important as some Ramp participants seek to move outside residential care and normalise their relationships. Matched and unmatched mentors also participate in Ramp activities and this provides opportunity for Ramp participants to engage with other adults and develop positive relationships.

Other mentoring programs are essentially about matching young people with mentors and supporting the mentor. Some conduct camps, however workshops, group activities and lead mentor visits are not generally included. If a young person does not want a mentor, there is no engagement with the program - Ramp provides multiple layers of support.

### TARGET GROUP

Another significant difference between Ramp and most other mentoring programs is the Ramp target group – most other programs do not work with young people in residential care, a group that is likely to have a more complex set of issues. As indicated earlier, most Ramp participants are or have been on the High Risk Register and have had Youth Justice involvement. Ramp has demonstrated that it is able to effectively engage with this hard-to-reach group and help them to achieve at least some positive change in their lives.

### RESOURCES

Ramp staff also point to the level of resources in the program, both staff and financial, as being a difference between their program and other mentoring programs and an important strength. Adequate funding enables Ramp to engage young people who are traditionally hard to engage. Extra resources means that they can employ lead mentors to visit residential care units to engage staff and young people, conduct workshops in topics that will interest young people, and provide other incentives to help get people along to activities (eg pizza dinner).

## ACCESS TO OTHER PROGRAMS

By having two organisations running Ramp that are also involved in a range of other programs, there is more opportunity to channel young people into other programs (eg employment programs). This also provides opportunity for Ramp participants to mix with other young people not in residential care. One Ramp participant is working towards becoming a Reach Crew member and this is seen as a significant achievement in terms of self-confidence and personal development. A number of other young people, initially engaged via Ramp, have participated in Whitelion employment programs.

## ROLE MODELS

Both Reach and Whitelion have high community profiles and this appears to lead to Ramp participants having access to a range of role models including musicians, successful footballers, performers, and people in the corporate world. Role models provide inspiration to Ramp participants, who are unlikely to meet such people in their everyday life.

## THE 'DREAM FACTORY'

Workshops are held at the Reach Dream Factory, which provides large spaces and excellent facilities that are very 'young-person friendly'. This enables a variety of activities to be held on-site; it is attractive and welcoming to young people, and assists in engaging them.

## THE REACH CREW

Ramp workshops and camps are run by Reach Crew, young people selected and trained by Reach to be program leaders. As the Crew are young, they can often relate better to younger people. Workshops provide opportunities for participants to learn about themselves, learn empathy and life skills; they also help participants to normalise their experiences and feelings as they will find that other people have gone through similar situations. Above all, workshops and camps are active and fun.

## MENTORS

Ramp mentors are committed and come from different walks of life. Whitelion screening is comprehensive and training provides mentors with sufficient background and skills to manage relationships with high-risk young people. Mentors believe they are well supported by Whitelion; considerable attention is devoted to this area and structures and frameworks exist to ensure that relationships are supervised.

## ONGOING COMMITMENT

While a number of other programs cease when a person reaches a certain age (regardless of individual circumstances), Ramp provides an opportunity for young people outside its upper target age (17 years) to continue involvement.

### Key Findings

- ❖ Ramp is unlike other mentoring programs in Victoria in several important ways, and offers more for younger people who reside in residential care and that are likely to have more complex issues.
- ❖ The Ramp service model embodies a number of significant strengths including multiple layers of support available through the Ramp community.

## RAMP PROGRAM COSTS

In the part financial year of 2004/2005, and complete years of 2005/2006 and 2006/07, and again in the part year from 1 July 2007 to 31 March 2008, Ramp pilot funding from DHS continued to be based on \$246,895 per annum, with targets of 20 young people matched to mentors and two annual camps. (Funding and targets were on a pro-rata basis for part financial years noted).

As described earlier in this report, Ramp consists of three components:

- Visits by lead mentors to participating residential care units to engage young people and staff in the program and identify those who might join Ramp.
- Workshops, camps and other activities for Ramp participants and other young people to initiate and build on bonds between participants and provide opportunities for young people to meet potential mentors.
- Mentors are selected, trained and supported, and are matched with a young person in a one-to-one mentoring relationship.

The lead mentor component and the program of workshops, camps and other activities are unique to Ramp and not a component of other mentoring programs. Other programs in Victoria and nationally are generally confined to one-to-one mentoring, emphasizing mentor recruitment, screening and training, and the provision of support throughout the life of the match.

Analysis of documentation provided by Whitelion shows the relative costs of the three components of Ramp to be:

Ramp Component	2006/07 Funding Breakdown
A. Lead mentors	\$56,860
B. Workshops, camp etc	\$90,204
C. One-to-one mentoring	\$117,019
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$264,083</b>

Assumptions:

1. All Reach costs have been allocated to B. Workshops, camp etc.
2. Whitelion program staff costs are split 7% to A. Lead mentors, 7% to B. Workshops and camp, and 86% to C. One-to-one mentoring (by management estimate).
3. 'Agency Costs' (Reach \$14,400 and Whitelion \$20,069) comprise management, administration, rent, finance etc and is allocated as per (1) and (2) above.

The Whitelion finance system reports actual expenditure on a program basis. For 2006/07, total expenditure for Ramp (after netting off income from Reach of \$8,000) was \$267,322 (i.e. exceeds funding by \$3,239). The system does not allow segmentation by program component which, if required, would need to be constructed from transaction reports.

Using the 2006/07 Funding Breakdown, Ramp unit costs are as follows:

Unit	Per Annum	Per Month
Young Person Engaged	\$4,126	\$344
Young Person Matched	\$10,157	\$846

Definitions:

1. 'Engaged' means involved in ongoing face to face meetings with a lead mentor or program worker; includes young people matched, those attending Ramp activities and those who do not wish or have yet to decide if they would like to attend Ramp activities and/or be directly matched with a mentor (N=64).
2. 'Matched' means participating in a one-to-one mentoring relationship, actively supported by Ramp, of duration greater than three months (N=26). Note this figure excludes 'potential matches,' which under Whitelion policy are classed as matches.

On a comparative basis, Ramp is more expensive than some other mentoring programs, as shown in the table below. Note that the figure shown for Ramp is per young person engaged, while all other programs show per young person matched. None of the comparison programs includes either lead mentor or workshop/camp components which add significantly to overall operating costs but are the factors that for Ramp facilitate engagement of hard to reach young people and in many cases lead to the creation of a mentoring match. Ramp participants are generally considered to be at higher risk than many of the young people targeted by other mentoring programs and have traditionally been very difficult to engage (although the Leaving Care mentoring programs do target the same cohort of young people, albeit in supporting those young people in their transitions to independence).

Program	Funded By	Unit Cost
Ramp	Office for Children, DHS	\$4,126
Leaving Care <sup>#</sup>	Office for Children, DHS	\$4,193

Program 1	Mentoring & Capacity Building Initiative, DPCD	\$3,417
Program 2	Mentor Marketplace, FaCSIA	\$3,336
Program 3	National Crime Prevention Program, Attorney General's Department	\$2,828

# Operated by Whitelion, estimated matches 40 per annum (as advised by Whitelion)

It should also be noted that the external programs cited in the table above may not be representative of the general class (Nucleus has extracted this data from reviews conducted for other community based providers over the past 18 months) - aggregate funding or performance data on a portfolio basis is not routinely available from Departments funding mentoring programs. It is therefore difficult to make any valid cost comparison between programs because the target groups are different and the programmatic inputs are different; it is considered probable however that even though comparison programs are working with young people experiencing considerable disadvantage, they may be unlikely to engage the Ramp target group.

Whether the cost differential between Ramp and other mentoring programs is justified cannot be determined without reference to outcomes data collected on a longitudinal basis, including the use of control groups, information that does not exist as far as we are aware either locally or internationally.

Notwithstanding the lack of objective comparative data, it would be appropriate to conduct an internal efficiency review of Ramp to identify possible savings.

### Key Findings

- ❖ Ramp is more expensive than other mentoring programs operating in Victoria due to the inclusion of lead mentors and workshops, a camp and associated activities in the service model.
- ❖ However, it is believed that it is these elements that facilitate the engagement of high-risk young people and lead to sustained mentoring relationships.

### Recommendations

3. Review Ramp operations for possible cost savings.
4. Quantify the long term savings and benefits to the community that Ramp might achieve through successful intervention in the lives of high risk, difficult to engage young people.

## COLLABORATION WITH OTHER SERVICES

### DHS PROTECTIVE WORKERS

Four surveys (50%) were returned by DHS protective workers and in three of those no feedback was provided about changes to young people since they became involved with Ramp. Two workers indicated there was little contact with or feedback from Ramp. One worker indicated that he/she case managed at least one young person involved with Ramp, but was unsure of exactly how many as no updates are received in relation to clients' involvement or progress with Ramp. This worker requested more feedback.

Each year Ramp organises a meeting for DHS protective workers to promote the program and provide information about the way it operates; however Ramp report that this is generally poorly attended. Ramp also indicated that they were sometimes not provided with important information about participants (e.g. when they move to other units or secure welfare) and that emails to DHS or phone calls and faxes were often not responded to.

It is a requirement that DHS workers provide or gain consent from parents or guardians for young people they case manage to attend Ramp activities; however, workers are unaware if the young people actually become involved.

This situation can be easily resolved by Ramp providing feedback about referrals. In order to work with young people, there needs to be more effective two-way communication between parties.

#### Key Findings

- ❖ There are barriers to effective communication between Ramp and DHS case managers and in some cases this may impede achievement of program objectives.
- ❖ Staff turnover, both within Ramp and DHS, must be taken into account when devising alternate communication and marketing plans.

#### Recommendation

5. Ramp staff and DHS EMR to consult on the best methods for Ramp to meet with DHS case managers and CSOs to determine ideal frequency, type and mode of information exchange that should occur.

### RELATIONSHIPS WITH RESIDENTIAL CARE

Due to the difficulty in engaging young people in residential care, the relationships between Ramp and staff in the residential units is very important. Three (3) of thirteen residential care staff returned evaluation surveys, with CSO auspice managers not interviewed as part of the evaluation. It is therefore difficult to draw conclusions in this area.

Ramp personnel indicated that their approach to staff in the eleven units is uniformly open, friendly and obliging. The response they say is variable, with not all staff being communicative or cooperative. Ramp indicated there is a high turnover of staff and numerous agency, part-time and temporary staff in the units. They therefore feel they need to constantly educate staff about Ramp

and work to gain their trust. Lead mentors try to build a rapport with residential care staff, often having a cup of tea with them when visiting. They see this as an essential part of their role and is included in position descriptions.

Ramp indicated that if staff are 'on-side' they tell residents about Ramp activities, remind them, 'talk them up', encourage them to attend and sometimes drive them. They also provide a conducive environment in the units for lead mentors to meet and engage residents. Some residential staff attend and participate in Ramp workshops, and telephone or email Ramp regularly to provide information about residents.

While there is insufficient data to support a conclusion, on the basis of the surveys received and intuitively, it would appear that where the relationship between Ramp and residential care staff works well, more residents are engaged and the involvement of those already participating in Ramp is supported.

The three (3) surveys completed by residential care staff indicated that they worked together with Ramp staff and/or the lead mentor that visits their unit, discussing the needs of residents, current issues, strategies to engage residents and possible activities to employ in the process. They also assisted lead mentors with relationship building with residents and worked together on potential matches. These staff indicated that they often invited lead mentors to the house for dinner as a way for them to spend time with residents. Residential workers sometimes went on outings with lead mentors, joined them in house programs, transported residents and liaised with them by phone.

### Key Findings

- ❖ For any program that requires access to funded tertiary services the relationship with staff and managers is critical to inform, engage and discuss issues that are relevant with the staff.
- ❖ Where the relationships are not established engagement and the development of supportive relationships are impeded.

### Recommendations

6. Ramp and DHS to examine ways to ensure residential care managers and staff are fully briefed on Ramp and work with lead mentors to encourage engagement of residents (where appropriate) in Ramp activities.

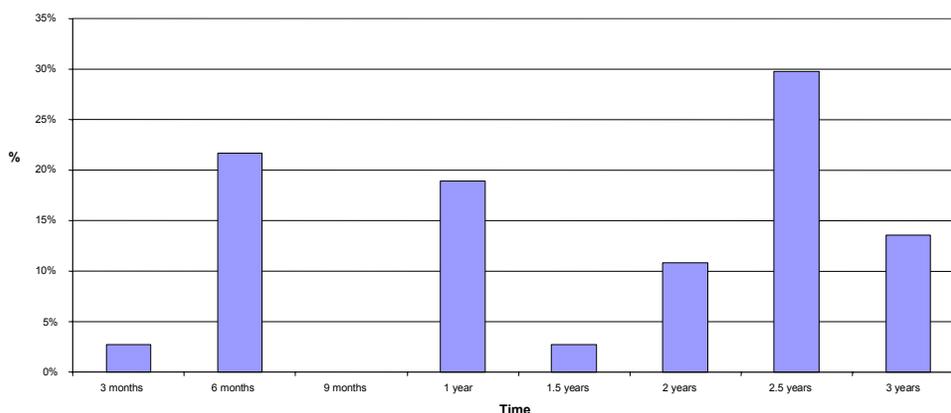
# PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES

## RAMP ACTIVITIES AND ATTENDANCES

As at July 2007, a total of 64 young people had been engaged by the Ramp program. Of these, 13 had not been formally nominated (a referral from a DHS protective worker is known as a 'nomination') but were participating in organised meetings with a lead mentor as a precursor to nomination.

The chart below shows the length of time that Ramp participants have been engaged within the program (mean involvement is 1.5 years):

Chart 1: Length of involvement with Ramp



Of the 16 Ramp participants interviewed for this evaluation, seven indicated they had been involved for less than one year, one person had been involved between one and two years, six had been involved between two and three years and two said they had been involved for three or more years. It was noted that without keeping records, many of those interviewed were unclear about their length of involvement and what activities they had attended in that time.

During 2006/07, Ramp held seven workshops, one camp and two other group activities. Attendance at these activities is shown in the table below:

Activity	Participants*
August Workshop	15
September Workshop	10
October Workshop	9
November Camp	9
Xmas Party	13
February Workshop	8
April Workshop	13
Movie Night – May	4
Go-Carting – June	5
June Workshop	6

\* Young people only, does not include mentors, Reach crew etc

Whitelion attendance records show that these activities were attended by 26 different young people (most attend more than one activity), as shown below:

Ramp Participants	Activities Attended
1	9
1	8
3	7
2	6
4	5
3	4
1	3
4	2
7	1

It should be noted that Ramp participants are sometimes unable to attend activities as they may be grounded, in secure welfare, in a detention centre or simply do not wish to attend on that occasion. Others may have difficulty obtaining transport to and from venues.

Two of the 2007 activities (go-carting and the movie night), and other activities since, were funded from a private donation to the Ramp program. Whitelion believes that these new activities helped to reinforce bonds within the Ramp community and gave mentors and young people an opportunity to get together between workshops. These activities are however outside DHS funding and Whitelion advises that they will not be able to be continued without extra funding.

Participants with mentors engaged in a wider variety of activities than those shown above, including going to the movies, karaoke, restaurants, cooking, having a coffee together, 'kicking a ball around', 'hanging out', going for a drive, and bowling. One participant attends a TAFE course with her mentor.

Of the 16 young people interviewed for the evaluation, three (19%) met with their mentor only and did not attend Ramp activities (one due to pregnancy). Most of the others attended a variety of activities including workshops, camps and other activities.

#### RAMP ENVIRONMENT

Ramp provides a safe, inclusive environment for participants to engage in activities. Young people living in residential care can feel uncared for and unimportant and Ramp staff make an extra effort to have them feel differently. Each participant is greeted when they come to an activity and nobody is left by themselves. There is usually at least one psychologist or social worker (from Whitelion or Reach) in attendance to ensure that participants are coping with the activities and group dynamics.

Ramp has established a set of guidelines to ensure safe and successful workshops. The guidelines include such things as the need for balanced gender representation amongst Reach Crew; the presence of a senior facilitator; supervision of participants in smoking breaks; role of lead mentors and crew in engaging participants and breaking up cliques; agreements with participants in relation to respect for other participants, no physical or verbal abuse, no leaving the room, etc.

Participants must agree to the rules as a condition of participation. Should incidents occur, they are considered on a case-by-case basis taking into account the context of the behaviour and the circumstances of the young person involved. Ramp staff indicated that over the previous year, no 'incidents' had occurred.

One participant interviewed however reported that Ramp rules were broken in a particular incident (over a year ago) and that while action was taken to deal with the situation at the time, appropriate longer term follow up may not have occurred. This account was unable to be verified due to issues of confidentiality; however, such situations if allowed to occur could jeopardise involvement and trust of other participants and have negative impacts on the individuals concerned. Routine review should ensure that policies and procedures for dealing with improper behaviour remain appropriate.

Reach Crew ensure that participants are listened to, acknowledged and not judged. Activities are structured and aim to get all participants to share their experiences and feelings. Through self-disclosure by staff and crew, young people learn they are not alone, they should not be ashamed and that they are not at fault for things that have happened to them. Ramp indicated that workshops and camps aim 'to celebrate the courage and learning of participants'.

### WORKSHOPS, CAMPS AND GROUPS

Workshops are structured and combine fun with learning and experiential activities. Activities focus on the future but acknowledge the past. Usually activities start in a big group, and then smaller groups are formed and often people end up in pairs before moving back to the larger group. This encourages the formation of relationships with other people, not just between mentor and mentee.

The camp venue is an attractive setting and promotes having fun and creative and experiential activities (such as fancy dress, making film clips, dancing, etc). Staff believe this is important as often participants do not have positive memories, nor do many of them know how to have fun 'in an innocent way' or with people outside school or the residential care system.

Other activities are also organised to make participants feel special. For example at Christmas a dinner is organised, with the table set and presents for everyone.

At camps and workshops, participants are encouraged and supported to do things they don't think they can do. It was reported that participants would push themselves to do something they may not normally feel comfortable with. After doing this they feel 'an incredible sense of achievement' and this is celebrated. This is seen as important as the participants are not used to achieving and it then gives them confidence to do other things.

## FACTORS IN ENGAGEMENT

Participants interviewed during the evaluation were asked how they became involved in Ramp: ten said they were invited by a lead mentor or Ramp worker, four were invited by residential care staff, one by a carer and the other was unable to specify.

When asked what they derived from Ramp, a number talked about it being fun and a place where they could meet new people. Others didn't enjoy the activities or some of the people attending. Comments from young people included:

- 'Cause it's fun. It's a bit confronting. I have to talk about myself, but in a good way. ... I'm feeling better about myself, learning about myself, meeting new people. I like having new friends.'
- 'Developed confidence in myself from camp experience.'
- 'Ramp is good for troubled kids. You learn to deal with emotions. ... It's very supportive, there is a sense of safety ... you share whatever you want to.'
- 'Just for a good night – socialize, meet people ... .They encourage me heaps, give me good self-esteem. I came out of my box..... And what you say stays there. It shows me I can trust them.'

Nearly all participants found attending Ramp activities to be a stimulating and inspiring experience. (However, it should be noted that the evaluation did not seek to obtain the views of young people who were not involved in Ramp, and it may be that this group would have a different view).

One participant wanted more activities and said:

- 'One workshop every two months is not enough, and it makes it hard for people who don't have mentors'.

Two participants commented that there was too much pressure to talk at the workshops. Staff acknowledged that workshops were 'not for everybody' and that some young people were not ready to open up or be in a large group.

Two girls with babies talked of the difficulty in attending Ramp activities because of a lack of childcare.

Ramp staff and residential care staff were asked about factors that might impact on program engagement and (while noting that the young people are diverse and have complex needs) provided the following views:

### Factors that Encourage Engagement

- Level of openness in the young person
- Absence of positive relationships with others
- Dynamics in their residential care unit
- Whether other young people in the house were engaged or had mentors
- Being present when the lead mentor visits
- Being treated as an equal
- Time to build up familiarity and trust, without pressure
- Good working relationship between residential care staff and lead mentors
- Promotion of Ramp by residential care staff

### Factors that Discourage Engagement

- Young person's personality and poor experiences in life
- Suspicion; trust issues with adults
- Fear of long term relationships
- Anxiety about meeting older people
- Some young people don't want to be with other young people from residential care i.e. they don't like being labeled or there has been a feud between participants
- Think it's 'not cool' to be involved with Ramp
- Heard negative things about Ramp
- Not heard anything at all about Ramp
- Distance from where reside, lack of transport
- Not liking unfamiliar faces in their life – 'just another worker'
- Other factors in their life i.e. a new boyfriend
- Not ready to engage in group activities
- Not having the language or understanding to talk about themselves
- Frequent absconding from residential care unit

### Key Findings

- ❖ Ramp activities are generally well attended, providing a safe environment where young people can have fun, meet new people and make friends.
- ❖ However, this was not a universal view with a small proportion of young people having negative or confronting experiences at Ramp activities. This may be due to the expectation that young people share their thoughts and experiences with strangers and friends.
- ❖ Activities are structured to maximise interaction and a positive learning environment for participants.

### Recommendations

7. In preparing for Ramp activities, examine any additional supports that might be reasonably required (e.g. child care) to maximise attendance.
8. Review policies and procedures for dealing with any inappropriate behaviour at Ramp activities.

# MATCHES

## THE MATCHING PROCESS

Nominations of young people to join Ramp come via DHS Child Protection in the Eastern Region. Ramp conducts an annual information session for Child Protection Workers and residential care staff to provide information about Ramp and encourage referrals to the program. In practice however, lead mentors visiting the 11 residential care units engage with residents and if they are interested, Ramp contacts DHS to arrange a referral or nomination.

Nominated young people are invited to Ramp workshops and activities where they can meet other participants and mentors. Often the lead mentor will arrange for a potential match to visit the young person at the unit. This occurs when the lead mentor considers a mentor and Ramp participant to have common interests, complementary personalities and similar ideas of what they want from a match.

Male mentors are always matched with males, and females with females. One unmatched participant commented that he had met with several potential matches however he struggled with having a male mentor. He would have preferred a female mentor 'but that was not allowed'. There may be opportunity for cross-gender matches to occur in certain situations, even if only for a limited time, to allow the mentee to experience a trusting relationship. (Note however that even though this young person did not have a mentor, he had opportunities to develop other positive interactions with adults through Ramp activities)

If a mentor and Ramp participant are interested in being matched, a trial period of up to three months is initiated. If both opt for an ongoing commitment, a commitment form is signed by both parties. Match goals and boundaries are set with the assistance of the Ramp Coordinator.

Wherever possible, the Ramp participant determines when they would like the match to be closed. If either party wants to discontinue the match, the Ramp coordinator speaks with each of them to negotiate the way closure should occur. If there has been no contact between the mentor and mentee for six months, the match is considered to be closed. A match can be re-established by mutual agreement.

When a mentoring match has been going for longer than two years, the Ramp coordinator will assess the match for transition into a friendship. If there are no concerns or issues and mentor support/supervision is not required, the young person feels independent and has adequate support networks, and both the mentor and Ramp participant can set and maintain appropriate boundaries, the transition can be made. The relationship is then called a graduated match.

### Key Findings

- ❖ Matches are carefully considered and given time to develop, including an initial trial and ongoing assessment to ensure both parties are committed.

### Recommendations

9. Review the possibility of cross-gender matches in certain situations where this may benefit participants.

## NUMBER OF MATCHES

Over 2006/07, there were 26 matches recorded<sup>12</sup> by Ramp. Of these:

- 19 were current as at year-end.
- Two were actively trialing (i.e. a young person and mentor had agreed to match and were engaged in a one-to-one mentoring relationship).
- Three had been formalized but discontinued without reaching one year in duration (two lasted six months and one five months).
- Two matches were closed having reached or exceeded one year in duration.

Also relevant to assessment of performance (but not included in DHS targets), six additional young people were actively supported in an official trial match but elected not to continue.

### Key Findings

- ❖ Ramp met the DHS service agreement targets in each of the financial years the pilot operated.

### Recommendations

10. DHS, Whitelion and Reach to meet and review the service targets in the Ramp service agreement.

## SUCCESS OF MATCHES

Turnover of mentors and length of relationship are indicators of the success of matches. Ramp currently has a total of 38 mentors, 11 of whom are unmatched.

Most mentors have been with the program for two or more years:

Involvement	Mentors
Less than 12 months	5
12 – 23 months	8
24 – 35 months	14
36 + months	11

Since Ramp commenced, there has been little turnover of mentors, with only four having withdrawn. The reasons for leaving Ramp are generally personal or revolved around a change of circumstances such as going overseas or having a child. It was reported that one mentor left the program, as she was frustrated and impatient with not being matched. (As a result of this, mentor training now draws attention to the fact that mentors may not be matched in the initial four to six months – limiting factors include young person readiness, compatibility and availability of match support i.e. management resources).

<sup>12</sup> A match has been defined as a one-to-one mentoring relationship established at least three months, as per DHS project brief

The length of Ramp matches as at 30 June 2007 is shown below:

Length of Match	Number*
6 months or less	3
7 – 12 months	4
13 - 18 months	5
19 – 24 months	12

\* Matches actively trialing excluded from data

Many Ramp matches (71%) had achieved the required 12 months, with most of the remainder still open and tracking towards that benchmark. Only three matches (12%) were discontinued prior to reaching one year.

Of matches that had achieved 12 months, 88% remained open and many of these were nearing two years in duration (when they are assessed for transition to a 'friendship' with concomitant withdrawal of Ramp support).

Ramp staff review matches every three months, formally with mentors and less formally with mentees. Ramp staff provide considerable support to mentors in the initial stages of the match or when the mentee 'fouls up', and indicated that mentors are generally satisfied with their matches but 'like all relationships there are ebbs and flows'. Mentors sometimes get frustrated with trying to 'get hold' of their mentees and can feel despondent when their mentee does something wrong.

Mentors were asked how satisfied they were in their role and to provide some illustration to support their position:

Unsatisfied		Mentor Satisfaction			Very satisfied	
1	2	3	4	5		

Mean 4.0, N= 14

Those who gave the highest rankings commented on the good support network, well-organised and interesting activities, the challenges and rewards of being a mentor, and the experience of fulfilling interactions with their mentees:

- 'It is indeed a blessing to be a mentor. I have been exposed to a side of society I never would have been and have met so many wonderful young people, staff and other mentors ...'.

Those who gave lower rankings indicated that building relationships was a slow process and that limited spare time combined with mentees being 'hard to catch' contributed to feelings of being able to do much more than currently being achieved.

Ramp participants interviewed were asked how the relationship with their mentor was going and what had been good about it. Twelve (92% of matched young people interviewed) were positive to very positive about their relationships with their mentor. Only one participant said that their relationship was not very good as they were not in contact enough (the participant met with their mentor about once a month but had not seen his mentor for three to four months). Comments included:

- 'Going pretty damn good. We see each other every Sunday. We just get along and do a lot of stuff together. He's moved on from mentor to best mate.'
- 'He helps me with things that are happening in my life.'
- 'It's like having another sister. ... I open up to her.'
- '...a new friend, someone to hang out with who won't get me into trouble.'
- 'Everything's been good, even the serious talks'.

Ramp reported that mentees are usually very fond of their mentors, although they indicated that the males generally take longer to form strong bonds.

Mentors were asked how successful their match had been and to provide some demonstration to support their view:

Not successful		<u>Match Success</u>		Very Successful
1	2	3	4	5

Mean 4.2, N= 14

Those that gave higher rankings commented on the care taken by Ramp to ensure a good 'fit' in terms of attributes/personalities. One commented:

- 'My mentee needed massive investment of time and effort and fortunately I've got the time .... I'm trying to be the consistent in his life. I think this helps ....'

Others who gave more moderate rankings talked of the relationship being in early stages and 'learning to wait', while a mentor who gave a low ranking noted the lack of time that he/she had and the difficulty in 'catching' his/her mentor:

- 'I've really struggled to get through to him in the past 12 months, and I would like to be doing a whole lot more with him. I feel we are lacking a connection at the moment.'

One residential care worker commented that young people without mentors miss a 'connectedness with someone special' and also missed a number of opportunities.

Information collected during the evaluation supports a number of conclusions about factors important in successful matches:

<b>Positive Factors</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A focus on building a trusting relationship before attempting to influence other outcomes</li> <li>▪ Systematic screening and formal orientation and training of mentors</li> <li>▪ Reviewing/ensuring the capacity of mentors to meet match commitments</li> <li>▪ Ongoing supervision and support for volunteers (while type and frequency of support and supervision varied within Ramp, regular contact was important as was a capacity to concentrate efforts when problems arise)</li> <li>▪ Regular face to face contact between mentor and the young person</li> <li>▪ Sound program design based on evidence of what works and supported by appropriate policies and procedures</li> <li>▪ Monitoring and review integrated throughout the program</li> </ul>

<b>Key Findings</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Most Ramp matches are successful, based on length of relationship, reported impact, and general satisfaction amongst both mentors and mentees.</li> </ul>

## MENTORING IN RAMP

The role of mentors in Ramp is 'to develop a constructive and beneficial relationship with a young person'. Mentors are expected to engage with their mentee through the pursuit of common interests, providing non-judgmental support and friendship.

Mentors are expected to meet with their mentee for at least three hours a fortnight and contact their mentee at least weekly by phone. Once matched, mentors are expected to commit to a minimum of 12 months.

Mentors are required to abide by the *Whitelion Code of Ethical Conduct*, seek guidance when problems arise, maintain monthly contact with the program coordinator and provide information about progress in the mentoring relationship.

### SELECTION TRAINING AND SUPPORT OF MENTORS

Potential mentors undergo a detailed screening process that includes:

- Submission of a structured application form.
- Attendance at information and training sessions (three).
- Interviews with the Whitelion program coordinator to assess past and present factors in the personality, interests and behaviour of each individual as regards proposed mentoring activities.
- Detailed referee checks (two).
- Police check.
- *Working with Children* check.

Characteristics that Whitelion looks for in prospective mentors include a sincere desire on the part of the volunteer to be involved in the life of a young person, respect for young people, being an active listener, capacity to empathise and capacity to work well in a group.

Information collected during the screening process is assessed and if the volunteer is believed to have the necessary attributes they are accepted as a Whitelion mentor. Screening generally takes two months.

At the present time, Ramp has 18 female mentors and 20 male mentors. Generally, the female mentors are younger than the males, ranging from 23 to 43 years (average age of 31) while the males range from 26 to 57 years (average age of 36). Almost 70% of mentors are between the ages of 26 and 35.

Employment status of mentors is shown in the table below:

Employment Status	Mentors
Full time employment	25
Part-time employment and part-time study	5
Part-time employment	2
Semi-retired	2
Full-time mother	1
Not recorded	3

Coordinators have fortnightly or monthly telephone or face-to-face contact with matched mentors and at *Mentor Matters* training. Additional support is provided when required. Unmatched mentors also have ongoing contact with a Coordinator and are invited to *Mentor Matters* training and other Ramp and Whitelion activities. Mentors must commit to a minimum of three *Mentor Matters* training sessions in a year.<sup>13</sup>

*Mentor Matters* sessions are held monthly from February to November. At these sessions issues facing young people and ways that the mentor can best support them are explored. Sessions are interactive, encourage peer support and guest speakers are often invited. Issues such as alcohol and drugs, behavioural problems and impact of these behaviours are explored.

Ramp staff believe the screening and training of mentors is highly effective and this is borne out by evidence collected during this evaluation. Staff consider training, accreditation and support of mentors to be extremely thorough, with feedback and evaluations after each training session used to assist in future training, selection and support.

All mentors surveyed (18) as part of this evaluation felt adequately prepared for their role supporting young people and believed that the mentor training met their needs. Comments included:

- 'It was excellent and there were a good variety of speakers and topics.'
- 'I have had a great time and learnt a lot and think the ongoing sessions provided many opportunities to ask questions and share experiences.'
- 'It spelt out pretty clearly what we were in for. Training should, though, point out that the more you put into it (your mentee/the program) the more you will achieve/receive. It can/should be demanding of your time.'
- '... provided some real life scenarios so I could grasp the importance of what I was committing to. ... helped me to define why I was volunteering.'

Several also offered useful suggestions and insights:

- 'Found it useful and interesting....(but) Some of the speakers could have made their presentations a bit more targeted to us....seemed like they hadn't taken the time to understand the Ramp program and role and responsibility of mentors.'
- 'The initial training is basic but the ongoing workshops and mentor nights are great and informative. Nothing, though, beats the training one gets when actually mixing with the younger people at workshops and camps.'

## Key Findings

- ❖ Screening and training of Ramp mentors is thorough and effective. Mentors are adequately prepared for their role supporting young people.
- ❖ There are roughly equal numbers of male and female mentors, with most aged between 26 and 35 years and in full-time employment.

<sup>13</sup> Mentoring Coordinators Manual, Whitelion, April 2007

## SUPPORT PROVIDED BY MENTORS

Of the ten participants currently matched and interviewed as part of this evaluation, three met with their mentor each week, five met fortnightly and two met monthly. Activities included going to the movies, karaoke, restaurants, cooking, having a coffee together, 'kicking a ball around', 'hanging out', going for a drive, and bowling. One participant attends a TAFE course with her mentor.

Ramp staff highlighted numerous situations where mentors played key facilitation roles. One participant was in a Youth Justice Centre for six months and his mentor visited him weekly and each fortnight picked up his parents so they could also visit (100 km round trip). Another mentor arranged three jobs for his mentee, and works one day a week with him to provide support. Other mentors have helped mentees find accommodation, helped them to move, and attend case planning meetings.

Participants with mentors were asked how their mentor had helped them. The responses were mostly positive and the following comments were made:

- 'She made me feel better about myself. Helped me to use my resources. ... She is a positive role model, shows me the right thing to do.'
- 'You learn to express to him.'
- 'He's given me a more positive look on life. I was depressed and he helped me get out of it.'
- 'I never used to do anything – now I do a lot of stuff.. helped me calm down.'
- 'Mentally and physically. ... I started looking after myself.'
- 'The mentor motivates me like sticking at it at school when I was going. She encourages me to do positive things - especially for myself ...'
- '... gets me to put a different perspective on things'.

Two participants commented that their mentors had helped them get jobs, and another said that his mentor had helped him when he was withdrawing from heroin. One participant had only been in his/her match for a short time and thought it was too early to comment, while another previously matched participant did not see Ramp as 'helping out' but as a program to have fun and 'hang out'.

Young people interviewed as part of the evaluation were asked about whether Ramp or their mentor had helped them with other things such as housing, school, work or doctors (note that this is not a principal aim of the Ramp program, but a useful byproduct). A summary of these experiences is provided below:

<b>Other Assistance</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Unmatched		6*
Matched	6	4

\* Three of these young people had previously been matched

Unmatched participants indicated that Ramp had been of little help to them in these areas. Of the six currently with mentors that had benefited from assistance in the nominated areas, two pinpointed their mentor as the reason.

The table below summarises the types of support reported during the evaluation:

<b>Support Provided by Mentors</b>
<u>Emotional support including:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Unconditional positive regard</li><li>▪ Appreciation</li><li>▪ Encouragement</li><li>▪ Caring</li><li>▪ Love</li><li>▪ Acceptance</li></ul>
<u>Assistance with:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Housing</li><li>▪ School</li><li>▪ Employment</li><li>▪ 'Getting off' drugs</li><li>▪ Transport</li><li>▪ Getting treatment for Depression</li></ul>

As indicated earlier, most participants come from families with complex issues and exhibit behaviour indicating a need for additional and professional assistance. The evaluation did not set out to collect information in this area and it was unclear from discussions whether young people accessed other specialist or general counselling services, apart from drug and alcohol services.

Where Ramp becomes aware that a young person would benefit from additional services and appears not to be obtaining them from existing networks, it may be appropriate to ensure case managers, residential care staff or specialist services are alerted (it is not Ramp's role to provide such services).

<b>Key Findings</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Most mentors spend time with their mentee weekly or fortnightly; young people are mostly very positive about the relationship they have with their mentor and the assistance they provide.</li><li>❖ Most mentors are very dedicated and work hard at their relationship; most consider their match to be successful.</li></ul>

<b>Recommendations</b>
11. Develop better communication processes between Ramp and DHS case managers to ensure timely feedback and, where appropriate, review provision of specialist and/or ongoing counselling and advice for young people in Ramp programs.

## POSITIVE ROLE MODELS

A positive role model is a person who is socially capable and who can guide and support another person. A positive role model can assist and motivate a young person, 'can bring new examples of career and life trajectories as well as new insights into the wider world and the possibilities it can offer.'<sup>14</sup> Research shows that positive contact with adults other than parents is important to young people during adolescence and can help them become resilient to life's challenges. Positive role models are used in the education, employment, sporting, youth justice and welfare sectors to mentor people and can impact on decision making, participation, self-esteem, resilience, physical and mental health, relationships and networks.

Adolescents (and others) naturally look for role models to shape their attitudes and behaviors; it is important that young people have exposure to a range of positive role models. The Ramp target group will have experienced many negative influences in their lives, and Ramp actively focuses on provision of positive role models to inspire enthusiasm and optimism. Ramp defines a positive role model as somebody who is 'living life positively and successfully'.

Through selection and style of activities, Ramp encourages young people to interact and establish relationships. Workshops and camps are designed for all participants - young people, mentors, potential mentors, Ramp staff and Reach Crew - to interact, relate and learn from each other. On occasions, participants are also able to meet other people they may find positive role models, including footballers, musicians and business people. The latter group may be invited to workshops or activities and participate as others do or they may be asked to tell their story. This provides further opportunity for participants to learn from others, to learn about possible alternatives and be encouraged to take a positive approach.

Lead mentors are also considered positive role models, and visit residential care units regularly to interact and form relationships with residents. Lead mentors also introduce potential mentors to the units to meet with participants.

### Key Findings

- ❖ Ramp exposes young people to a variety of positive role models and encourages and assists participants to interact and establish relationships.

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<sup>14</sup> Mentors and Role Models for Young People, Education Foundation Australia, undated

# IMPACT ON PARTICIPANTS

Information relating to changes achieved by young people as a result of their participation in the Ramp program was sought from participants themselves, their mentors, Ramp staff, residential care staff and DHS protective workers.

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

### SELF-AWARENESS

Young people interviewed as part of the evaluation were asked about changes they felt they had achieved since becoming involved with Ramp. The nature and impact of reported changes were discussed with interviewees, with specific examples noted by the consultants. A summary of those experiences is provided below:

Self Awareness	Positive Change	No Change
Unmatched	3*	3 <sup>#</sup>
Matched	8	2

\* Two of these young people had previously been matched

# One person had previously been matched

Of those young people unmatched at the time of interview, three said they had changed significantly since entering the program. Of these three, two had previously been matched (graduated matches); it appears likely, but could not be confirmed, that the earlier match experiences contributed significantly to the changes achieved. The third person also attributed positive change to Ramp, even though they had not had a mentor, through meeting with a lead mentor and attending Ramp activities.

Three participants said they had not changed, with one from this group having a graduated match.

Comments made by participants included:

- 'I'm a lot happier, more willing to do stuff. I have higher self-esteem'.
- 'I socialise easier because of recreational activities, because I need to relate to kids my own age and relate like a "normal" kid, not a loner. ... Ramp helps me to relate to my peer group.'
- 'Personal changes – I am more self-controlled, dealing and handling kids in care better. Managing stress and my temper. ... more social confidence ...'
- 'No real changes. They (lead mentor) just came for dinner. Didn't do much'.

Of those matched at the time of interview, eight said they had changed significantly since entering Ramp and one said they had not changed. One participant had experienced negative change, but said this was not necessarily due to Ramp; he/she recounted both positive and negative experiences with Ramp.

Most of this group believed that Ramp had played an important role in their changes; the predominant view can be summarised in a single comment:

- 'I needed a direction to go in and they pushed me in that direction'.

Other comments from members of this group included:

- 'It's contributed to a lot of things. Being able to have fun in a safe way, a safe environment, without alcohol. Having the right kind of fun, good, fun, nice fun. (Previously) I always had fun in an unsafe way, or not have fun at all. I was always feeling isolated and jealous, and then Ramp came along.'
- One participant talked of his improvement at school and increasing confidence. 'This is important because I want to be a better person. I want to achieve things and to do this I need experiences with Ramp. Without it I would not be as positive ...'
- 'I'm a lot nicer. I never used to relate to people, just used to sit at home. I feel more relaxed to talk with others and in general ... not as many nerves ...' The change is seen as significant 'because I didn't like who I was'.
- Another participant talked of the workshops and interacting with others her own age and as a result she didn't feel alone.
- 'It helps you express yourself better, let emotions out, treating people better, listening to people better ... It's changed who I am.'
- 'It has helped me get into other things (job), setting goals to save money. ... I can get a car and have a life.' This participant's mentor encouraged him to contact family members. 'It's good to have family around – especially for Christmas'
- 'I'm probably asking for help a lot more. I'm not as bottled up inside myself. I didn't express myself (years ago), couldn't open up. I didn't have the skills. Ramp helped me with my social skills. I always had problems with self-esteem. I was real frustrated. I used to feel ignored most places ... I feel better about myself, emotionally more secure. I have better relationships with people because I find it easier to talk ...'.

Ramp staff strongly supported the proposition that many of the young people had experienced positive change. Ramp staff believed that many of the program participants became more open and articulate, less shy, increased their self-awareness and maturity, and had more confidence than other young people from similar backgrounds that had not participated in Ramp.

Ramp staff were unable to differentiate outcomes between participants with and without mentors, due to low numbers of young people who have thus far stayed in the program for a long period without electing to match.

Mentors were asked whether their mentee's behaviour had changed since they got to know him or her:

Not at all	Positive Behaviour Change			Significant
1	2	3	4	5

Mean 3.3, N= 15

Comments from mentors about this question indicated that behaviour change is often mixed, with some positive and negative incidents cited and 'ups and downs' along the way. However, overall, most agreed that changes were generally 'heading in the right direction'. Only one indicated that it was too early yet to say. Illustrative comments included:

- 'He used to be a very angry, in your face person. He's a lot calmer these days. He has still though made some terrible choices, crime wise, over the period....'
- 'My mentee's behaviour is up and down due to her emotional issues'.

- 'She has gone through phases of being more or less confident and more or less connected with what is going on around her...'
- 'My mentee gets enjoyment out of being involved in Ramp and having contact with a large group of people which is foreign in her day-to-day life. We take comfort in the little achievements and the number of activities she gets involved in with Ramp is time that is not spent participating in negative social interactions.'
- 'Too early to tell but looking promising.'

One residential care worker saw no noticeable change in residents as a result of their involvement with Ramp, while the other two workers said that young people were more open with others and had an 'increased sense of value/importance' through participation in Ramp, were more appreciative and thoughtful, not wanting to let their mentors down. The three respondents saw that mentors make a difference by providing a trusted and interested person in the young person's life, providing attention and quality time, showing them that people care about them and by providing a role model from outside the world of residential care:

- (Mentors provide) 'someone just for them rather than competing in their home environment for staff attention'.

## Key Findings

- ❖ Young people with mentors have achieved some significant changes in their lives. Most believed these changes were a result of participating in Ramp, a view reinforced by Ramp staff and residential care workers.

## SELF-ESTEEM AND CONFIDENCE

Changes in the self-esteem and confidence of young people participating in Ramp improved in all cases, according to mentor respondents:

Worse		<u>Self Esteem and Confidence</u>			Better	
1	2	3	4	5		

Mean 4.0, N= 14

Ramp staff also indicated that participants have increased self-esteem and confidence, felt validated, were more mature, and because there were people in their lives who encouraged and reminded them, they started thinking ahead.

Residential care workers involved in the evaluation also thought that Ramp had an impact on young people's self esteem and confidence. Workers indicated that for some young people, Ramp had provided more positive reinforcement and social skills, made them more open to talking about themselves, and that they felt valued and appreciated. One commented that the girls in her unit groom themselves when they are going out with their mentors. Another worker commented that participants with mentors have better self-esteem than those without mentors.

Upon review of case notes, one DHS protective worker thought that the young person they case managed had increased self-esteem and confidence since becoming involved with Ramp and attributed this to involvement in activities and the positive relationships formed.

Mentors also saw improvements in mentee interpersonal and communication skills as a result of participation in Ramp, although typically more modest gains:

Worse	Interpersonal/Communication Skills			Better
1	2	3	4	5

Mean 3.3, N= 15

Relationships are likely to grow when people are more open about themselves. This in turn can lead to greater confidence and improved self-esteem. Mentors were asked whether mentees volunteered information about themselves – just over half said that this happened more often as the program proceeded. One mentor experienced the opposite reaction. Comments included:

- 'Initially my mentee was introverted, but soon became comfortable enough to share his history, family experiences and future dreams. I find that he is willing to open up about aspects of his life that have not resulted in good outcomes for him. This is important for his growth I feel, because it means he is thinking about his actions and the consequences.'
- 'I think she is more comfortable talking about what has been going on in her life but still generally only when prompted by a question. I find it very difficult to get her to open up to what she is feeling.'

Residential care staff also believed that Ramp impacted on young people's interpersonal and communication skills, attributing this to lead mentors and prospective mentors visiting the unit and engaging with them.

As an indicator of increased confidence, participants were also asked about what they were planning to do over the next few months, with the aim of finding out whether they had goals and if they were working towards them. Unmatched participants (including those who had been in a previous match) all had goals relating to school, study or work and were working towards them, some in active ways such as 'going to school every day'. Some participants also had plans to move back to their family.

Of matched participants, most had goals related to school or work, with some participants having specific goals such as saving money, going to a 'detox' centre to withdraw from heroin, or finding a place to live. Although both groups had goals, matched participants appeared to be making more significant progress towards achieving them, although the sample is not large enough to support such a conclusion. Residential unit staff responding to the survey did not think Ramp had any impact on the future plans of young people in their unit however they believed that there was potential for this to happen over time.

### Key Findings

- ❖ Many young people involved in Ramp developed better self-esteem and confidence, contributing in some cases to improved interpersonal and communication skills and the establishment of goals.

## RELATIONSHIPS

### WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Young people interviewed as part of the evaluation were asked about their relationships with friends and family and whether these had improved since becoming involved with Ramp. Where changes were reported, the consultants sought specific examples. A summary of young people who experienced change in this area is provided in the table below:

<u>Relationships</u>	<b>Positive Change</b>	<b>No Change</b>
Unmatched	4*	2
Matched	7	3

\* Three of these young people had previously been matched

Four of six unmatched participants interviewed (including three that had been involved in an earlier match) indicated that their relationships in these areas had improved. One had reconnected with his father but was adamant that Ramp had nothing to do with it. One said that his relationships with housemates had improved and this had been helped by them also attending Ramp. Comments included:

- 'They've (relationships) changed heaps. I'm in a real good mood when I come home, and with friends in general. My family relationships went from 6 to 10. They (Ramp) put me in a good frame of mind.'

Of matched participants, five said that their relationships with family and friends had improved, two had no improvement with family but an improvement with friends, two said that relationships had not improved, and one indicated that his relationship with family was already good. Comments included:

- 'My outlook on life has brought me closer to family and friends. The relationships are definitely better.'
- 'Friends at Ramp are better because I can socialise better. Family definitely because I have the ability to talk to others now.'
- 'Friendships have become a lot stronger. I'm seeing them a lot more. My family relationships are a lot happier too. My brother and I are a lot closer. There's been no change with my Mum.'

Mentors indicated that in most situations, young people had made changes in relation to their family or peers since becoming involved and saw some early signs of positive change. For a number however, it was still 'too early to say':

Not at all	<u>Relationships with Family/Friends</u>			Significant
1	2	3	4	5

Mean 2.5, N= 14

Comments included:

- 'Relationship with her mum has basically been Ok since I've known her but with a few bad patches. But she's just moved into a bungalow at her mum's place which I think will be a good thing.'
- 'I have worked really hard in this area and am proud to help him connect with his parents/sister. A month ago he spent three nights a week at home, the first time in at least two - three years.'

- 'It has been up and down. He got closer to his closest relative, but then things went bad recently and this has taken a step backward.'
- '(mentee) is becoming more confident and assertive of his own needs.'

Residential care workers reinforced the views of mentors as regards changes in relationships with family and peers. One commented that a participant had 'a little more patience with her mother' and another worker said that there was little contact with family by participants even though it was promoted. It was noted that changes often depended on the personality of the young people and that it is difficult to attribute this to having a mentor.

One DHS worker indicated that the relationship between his/her client and his mother had improved since his involvement with Ramp, but noted that his relationship with his father remained unchanged.

### Key Findings

- ❖ Most young people interviewed indicated that relationships with family and friends had improved since becoming involved with their mentor, although for many these were tentative 'first steps' (and may not be solely attributable to Ramp).

#### WITH STAFF IN RESIDENTIAL CARE UNITS

Three of the unmatched participants said that relationships with staff in the unit had not changed since they became involved with Ramp; two indicated they already had good relationships. One participant said that he could not respect people who took him away from his family. A number of the matched participants indicated that their relationships with house staff were positive and there had been little change in relationships since their involvement with Ramp.

Two mentors surveyed indicated that their mentee's relationship with residential care staff had changed with one being a positive change and the other negative. Three said they did not know and two indicated this was not applicable as the mentee was living in foster care or at home.

Two residential workers indicated there were limited, if any, changes in relationships with staff since involvement with Ramp, while one worker indicated there were significant changes. Another worker indicated there was continued respect and open communication. Workers indicated there were no discernible differences between those young people with or without mentors.

### Key Findings

- ❖ Relationships between young people and residential staff are complex however young people interviewed noted that these relationships were for the most part largely positive.

## RESPONSIBILITY AND CONTROL OF FUTURE

An objective of Ramp is to encourage participants to take responsibility for and control their future. Ramp aims to improve the social connectedness of participants, and improve their skills in relating to people, agencies and key others who have the capacity to assist them. It also aims to improve young people's motivation and preparation to (re)engage with education, training and employment.

According to Ramp staff, participants that have engaged with Ramp felt they had choices in their lives, some power or control and that they had gained knowledge or wisdom. Staff believe that Ramp challenges young people to take responsibility for their behaviour, and they get positive support to change; they think that Ramp participants feel empowered and strive to achieve their goals.

Staff say there is a positive correlation between a young person's connection with Ramp and their mentor, and how frequently they relapse (but have only observation to support this). Participants make more informed decisions and realise there are other options. However, staff also recognised that there are other factors in participant's lives and that changes can also come about by changes in their living environment.

### SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Young people interviewed as part of the evaluation were asked about any new social connections established since commencing with Ramp. Where changes were reported, the consultants discussed with young people why these changes may have occurred and sought specific examples. A summary of young people who experienced change is provided in the table below:

Connectedness	Positive Change	No Change
Unmatched	4*	2
Matched	6	4

\* Three of these young people had previously been matched

Four of the six unmatched participants (including those that had a previous match) indicated that they had made new connections since becoming involved with Ramp. For several, these new connections were directly due to Ramp e.g. one participant was encouraged to go to a day program where he got to know people. One female participant with a baby joined a mothers group, and although she said this had nothing to do with Ramp, it was not clear that this was necessarily the case.

Of the matched participants, six of ten interviewed said that they had formed new connections in the community. Some had developed new friendships, a new relationship, and attended a sport or church group for the first time:

- 'Life is not so boring now. I never had social connections and I have now started martial arts ... I have the confidence to do this now.'
- 'I became involved in a youth group at the local church and my confidence has increased. I go weekly and get a lot out of it.'
- One participant had developed friendships in the local area. '... I treat people in a different way, I'm no longer angry and violent.'

Nine mentors indicated that their mentees had made new connections; two said they were unaware of any such connections. Comments included:

- 'My mentee's connections tend to fluctuate through good times and bad. While he makes new connections, these can often be short lived.'

- 'I think his new friends are more social and outgoing and are giving him more confidence ... .'
- 'He has made connections with some other individuals in the program and most have been positive.'

One DHS protective worker indicated that the social connectedness of their client had improved since their involvement with Ramp, by having adults with whom he/she can relate to and enjoy spending time with.

All mentors surveyed indicated that their mentee participated in more positive social and recreational activities since they had come to know them, although for a number this was patchy:

None	Positive Social/Recreational Activities			More
1	2	3	4	5

Mean 3.1, N= 13

One mentor commented that his mentee had changed his friends over the previous year and was starting to go out and have fun, while another said that his mentee had recently gone on a camping trip with a local church group.

Residential care workers believed Ramp had made an impact on the social connectedness of young people. Factors thought to have helped included having someone as a 'constant' in their lives who is committed to listening and being there. One worker commented that the lead mentor was a factor in this by visiting the unit and showing a genuine interest in residents.

One residential care worker, however, thought there was no change in this area saying that the young people in his/her unit were resistant to external activities 'outside of what they know is safe in units'.

Most mentors surveyed (14) indicated that their mentee talks of future plans; one mentor said:

- 'He dreams, unrealistically sometimes but generally lives in the now'.

Two mentors indicated that these plans had changed since they became involved and two said that there had been no change. One mentor commented that his mentee never used to talk about the future. One residential care worker indicated that young people in his/her unit aspired to be like their mentors.

Key Findings	
❖	Many young people involved in Ramp have developed new social connections, which have generally been positive.
❖	Young people with mentors are participating in some positive social and recreational activities as a result of Ramp.

## USE OF ALCOHOL OR OTHER SUBSTANCES

Young people were asked about their use of alcohol and other substances:

Substance Abuse	Positive Change	No/Negative Change
Unmatched	3*	3
Matched	7	3

\* All of these young people had previously been matched

All but one of the unmatched participants used drugs or alcohol. One participant said he drank responsibly and two indicated that their use had changed or decreased; three indicated that there had been no change. One participant said that he used to chrome with some other young people from residential care that also came to Ramp, but that he did not mix with those people anymore. (The chroming did not occur at a Ramp activity). Another said that he used to chrome but stopped when he met his mentor. This person also said that he used to binge drink and black out with other drugs but no longer did this either.

Of matched participants, a number said they did not use drugs, but drank. Some indicated their drinking had decreased since involvement with Ramp, however one participant said that he drank more as he had more of a social life since becoming involved. Another participant said that her use of heroin had increased since being involved with Ramp, but was unsure why this might have occurred.

Another participant talked of no longer using heroin and how his mentor had helped him with this. He recalled an incident of craving at 3.00 AM, calling his mentor on the telephone and talking with him for 40 minutes - this had stopped him from using heroin. Another participant said:

- 'I smoked dope. I drank a lot, but not much any more. I don't go out alone searching for drinks anymore. I attribute quite a bit to Ramp, and am a "happy drinker" now. I don't touch drugs now. I've refused twice.'

Mentors were asked in the survey as to whether their mentee's use of alcohol or other substances had changed since they had known them:

Worse	<u>Use of Alcohol and Other Substances</u>			Better
1	2	3	4	5

Mean 3.2, N= 12

One mentor commented:

- 'He tries to abstain from chroming and alcohol abuse but more often than not breaks. His abstinence periods are however, much longer.'

Residential care workers indicated that there were some changes to level of alcohol or other substance use since residents became involved in Ramp:

- 'One particular person has decreased use - recognizing that it's better to be lucid and enjoy people than being high all the time.'

One DHS worker commented that his/her client no longer chomes since becoming involved with Ramp and talks of giving up smoking.

### Key Findings

- ❖ In a significant proportion of cases, young people decreased use of drugs and alcohol since becoming involved in Ramp (although the extent to which this can be attributed to Ramp program participation is unclear).
- ❖ A minority of young people reported an increase in drug use although, again, this could not necessarily be attributed to Ramp.

### Recommendation

12. Ramp should review cases where increased drug or alcohol use is noted and ensure that appropriate steps are taken to minimise harm. Improved communication between Ramp and DHS case managers and residential staff is critical to ensure a coordinated response to substance abuse issues.

## SCHOOL AND WORK ATTENDANCE

Young people interviewed as part of the evaluation were asked whether their attendance at school or work had improved since Ramp began. Where changes were reported, the consultants discussed with young people why these changes may have occurred and sought specific examples. A summary of young people who experienced change in this area is provided in the table below:

School/Work Attendance	Positive Change	No Change
Unmatched	3*	3
Matched	2	8

\* Two of these young people had previously been matched

Three unmatched participants said their school or work attendance had improved since Ramp began (two of these people had been in a successful match prior to the time of interview) and three said there had been no change.

Of matched participants, two indicated that their school attendance had improved but eight others reported no change. However, of this latter group, one said he was now more committed and another said he was more confident. One participant who did not work or go to school said that she had thought about school a lot more and felt more ready to attend. The most negative outcome concerned a young person who said that she 'dropped out when I was self-harming so it has got worse.'

Mentors were asked whether their mentee's school attendance or work participation had changed:

Worse	School Attendance or Work Participation			Better
1	2	3	4	5

Mean 2.75, N= 11

Apart from two cases where significant gains were made, mentors did not think their mentee had experienced much change in this area. A number of mentors felt unready or unable to provide a view. One mentor commented:

- 'School is non-existent and work is stop/start at the moment because it's his first try at work so he's still learning.'

Residential care workers did not notice significant changes in school attendance or work participation by residents since commencing with Ramp. One worker noted that a young person remained in a program but another demonstrated no improvement. One worker commented:

- 'I believe (change) will come with age and mentor influence as a role model.'

In terms of believing whether young people had improved their *awareness* of education, training or employment possibilities, mentors were equally divided. Some believed that understanding had increased, some did not, and some were unsure. One mentor commented:

- 'He left school in grade 5 and ....done practically nothing in any sort of education, training and employment'

Two residential care workers thought there was no change in this area whereas another worker indicated there had been a change in awareness, indicating that some residents had benefited from employment opportunities. One DHS worker indicated that their client's awareness had changed since they became involved with Ramp and is now attending a TAFE course.

## Key Findings

- ❖ A limited number of young people improved school or work attendance during their participation in Ramp, but for most others there was no real change observed. However, for a number, Ramp appears to have improved awareness of education, training and employment possibilities, which with reinforcement may lead to some change in the future.

### ACCESS TO OTHER WHITELION AND REACH PROGRAMS

Whilst not a primary objective of Ramp, participants were asked whether they had done anything else with Whitelion or Reach. Both organisations run a number of other programs that may also be of benefit to Ramp participants.

Ramp staff reported that at least 16 young people from Ramp have become involved with the Whitelion Employment Program, the Young Lions (Leadership) Program or the Role Models Program. Six participants have become involved in other Reach programs.

Of young people interviewed, three indicated they had undertaken other activities and two not. It appeared however that participants had difficulty differentiating Whitelion and Reach activities from Ramp activities, limiting the conclusions that may be drawn in this area. One of the unmatched participants was in the Youth Justice Centre at the time of interview and indicated that Whitelion comes to the Centre each week and conducts painting and sporting activities, but that he chooses not to get involved.

## Key Findings

- ❖ A number of young people have progressed to other programs through their involvement in Ramp.

## CASE STUDIES

Three case studies have been developed to illustrate and enrich the findings of the report:

### **1. Dan (matched and attending activities)**

Dan was nominated to the Ramp Program as a 14 year old some two-and-a-half years ago. A worker from RAMP rang and invited him to attend an evening workshop at Reach. At the time he was experiencing many difficulties in his life. His family situation was far from ideal (hence his guardianship order), he was being bullied at school which led to violent reactions, his self esteem was low and he verbalized some suicide ideation.

During Dan's first few Ramp activities, he remained withdrawn and did not participate fully. However, when he became matched with a mentor he began to take a more active role in group activities. Dan didn't immediately match with his mentor, but after meeting up a couple of times through organised activities, eventually it felt right. According to Dan's carer (with whom he has now been living for 18 months – his longest placement since going into care), his behaviour and attitude improved at home as well.

At the last Ramp Camp, other mentors also noted Dan's new-found confidence and how much happier and involved he seems. Dan's carer reports that he is now fully committed to school and is happy and keen to remain so (Dan hadn't attended school for three months before RAMP, having moved around a lot). Dan has become a fully participating member of the Ramp Community where he is viewed as an intelligent young man with a great sense of humour who is always fun to be around.

Dan and his mentor have continued to catch up on a fortnightly basis to this day. They also speak over the phone each week and go bowling together, attend the movies and regularly eat out at different restaurants. Dan's mentor has been astounded at the changes in him. Dan now initiates contact between the pair, regularly calling his mentor to arrange a catch-up. His mentor reports that Dan's self-esteem, communication skills and maturity have increased dramatically since they first met. Dan is very positive about the relationship: "its almost like having an extra family member – more than a friend – they go over and above what your friends would do." Dan is not afraid to ask his mentor anything and they share many exchanges on a wide range of subjects.

Dan has also made some new connections in the community since becoming involved with Ramp, attending a youth group locally at a church: "I go weekly and get a lot out of it. Normally same people and I enjoy it".

When asked how he has been helped by his mentor, Dan reflects that he never used to do anything but that now it's a lot different, he's more active and has "calmed down" a lot. He's moved a tree in the front yard where he's living, done maintenance and learned to use a computer (he's even attempting to make his own computer at the moment). Dan thinks he's "...a lot nicer – never used to relate to people just used to sit at home. Feel more relaxed to talk with others and in general. Not as many nerves, peace at home and school mostly".

Overall, Dan has attended more than 10 Ramp workshops, a number of holiday activities and two camps. These have been evenly spaced over time, with six activities attended in the last 12 months. Dan says he always goes whenever invited, unless he's sick or away. "Even if (mentor) isn't there at workshops I still match (talk) with anyone else – with new people and new experiences, unique experiences, learning for the first time."

Dan is now actively planning for the future and lists among his goals finishing year 10 at school, getting his learner's permit, playing the guitar and doing music at school (his uncle is a music teacher). He would like to stay living in his current house until he is 18 and later do a TAFE course: "ideally I would be a guitarist like Judas priest but have something else to do as well". Dan has also taken up a martial art in order to work on his fitness and improve his body image which had been a concern for him.

When asked what has contributed to these changes, Dan says "I didn't like who I was" but have "become more certain and make up my mind," "become a bit more confident always helps". "Matching me with another person has really helped".

## **2. Jordan (matched but not attending activities)**

Contact with Jordan was first made by a Lead Mentor one year ago. He had just been placed into care due to his mother's incarceration and limited contact with his father. At the time he was being treated for depression and engaging in multiple substance use. Over the next six months Jordan grew to know and trust his Lead Mentor and expressed an interest in attending a Ramp Workshop. Kids from his last house were also going and, when someone from RAMP asked him to go, "it sounded alright".

Jordan attended a Workshop (which he didn't like: "weird people who make you stand up in a circle in front of 50 people and talk; they make you jump around like a goose – its supposed to get you in the mood") and was introduced to a prospective mentor on the night. After a few supervised house visits with the Lead Mentor, Jordan and his mentor began meeting independently before being formally matched.

Jordan is not particularly interested in attending any other Ramp activities ("they tried to make me go to camp but couldn't be bothered") but is being encouraged by his mentor and has come to an agreement with him that he'll go to one more activity before the end of the year. "I like my mentor but don't like the program – the mentor and people there are ok but not the program".

Initially, the goal of the match was to work on Jordan's resume in order to find him some employment. His mentor was surprised at Jordan's dedication to the match and that he regularly contacted his mentor to arrange activities. As well as actively seeking employment, Jordan also volunteered to address his substance use issues by going into detox; he also began to spend more time at his unit rather than absconding.

When asked about his relationship with his mentor, Jordan says "I like his car! We go out places and get to chat. He helps me with things that are happening in my life". Jordan sees his mentor weekly and they go to the movies or go out for tea – "what ever I want to do really". The mentor has helped Jordan look for a job, talking every couple of days. Jordan understands that he can call his mentor "whenever I have a problem. He helped when I was suffering heroin withdrawals and needed to call in the middle of the night. He is more like a friend. When I was thinking about going back to school, he helped look up courses. He helped me get a job as an apprentice chef, he bought the newspaper to look for jobs and went through it together".

At the time of writing, Jordan is now entering his second month of employment as an apprentice chef. He works at a local restaurant 10am to 10pm shifts with a three hour break. He has reported to his mentor that he's enjoying the work and is happy to have found a potential trade.

Ramp hasn't helped Jordan make any new connections in the community, and at interview Jordan says that he doesn't think that relationships with family or friends have improved or that relationships with staff in his unit have gotten better. However, his carers report that Jordan's substance use and absconding have dramatically reduced and that his general behaviour around the unit and attitude towards staff is much better.

In addition, his mentor encouraged Jordan to contact his aunt (his mother's twin sister). His mother and her twin didn't get along, but are now talking again and Jordan now occasionally stays with his aunt and gets along well with cousins. His mother is currently in jail so he mentioned the importance of this new family connection: "It is good to have family around – especially for Christmas".

Jordan is currently putting away \$50 a week to save for a car: "I can get a car and have a life." Jordan has also stopped using heroin for the "simple reason that its not healthy" and "I was getting out of control".

### **3. Damian (attending activities but unmatched)**

Damian's first contact with the Ramp program was in late 2006 through the Lead Mentor at his residential care unit. At that time, Damian had been in care for some months after being unable to live with either of his parents due to his mother's own personal issues and a difficult relationship with his father. Damian was regularly seeing a CAMHS worker for self-harm and depression and had recently started using chrome.

In the first few visits, Damian refused to meet with his Lead Mentor, but in time - and after several visits – his interest in Ramp increased. Over a few months and several coffees a strong bond with the Lead Mentor was established. Initially Damian stated that he did not want a mentor and was reluctant to come to large group activities, however after a few months he changed his mind and agreed to meet with a potential mentor. "I responded to the invitation because I didn't have much of a social life and I knew a few people who went to RAMP". This meeting with the potential mentor went well, but Damian decided against a match.

Later, he attended a connection workshop and then an activity day, and after seeing his friend with her mentor at both, decided that he would like to meet with another potential mentor, which he did a couple of times. However, again, he decided that a match was not for him. "I struggled with male mentors...preferred a female mentor but that was not allowed".

Despite not having a mentor match, Damian's involvement in Ramp has remained strong with regular contact with the Lead Mentor continuing and attendance at another workshop recently. Damian's confidence has grown noticeably, and at the last workshop he spoke up on a number of occasions and stated his interest in further group activities and the camp. ("I've only had a bad experience with one person attending who is no longer there, so will go to the next workshop. I get along with the workers and get to catch up with young people"). Damian has also been karting, bowling and to Luna park with Ramp – "it's really good getting people opening up". At the weekend camp "we did pretty good stuff....get really deep and open up".

For now, Damian is content to come along to group activities without a mentor, which highlights the positive benefit of Ramp as a community rather than just the gathering of matches. He has established rapport with many Ramp staff, mentors, crew and other young people and is excited at the prospect of further involvement.

In the time he has been involved with Ramp, Damian has reduced his use of chrome - "I saw it as stupid and cut down and don't hang with those people anymore. Quit altogether but using soft drugs at same level". While he still has instances of low mood this has become less frequent and the staff at his unit have noted the positive changes in his behaviour. The most significant change that Damian has noticed since entering Ramp has been that he is able to "socialise easier because I need to relate to kids my own age and relate like a normal kid, not be a loner. I'm more mature so usually only relate to older people and I find this important but RAMP helps me relate to my peer group. I was in a way forced to interact with people my own age – kids my age weren't so bad after all."

Damian doesn't feel his relationships with family or friends have changed much since becoming involved with RAMP, he has some friends he met outside RAMP and some he's met at RAMP. Similarly, he doesn't think that relationships with staff in his unit have changed – Damian believes he has always related well with them. Encouraged by Ramp, Damian also went to a youth group for a while with kids he met through the program, but it has since closed.

Over the next few months, Damian is planning to continue his distance schooling and learn to dance (hip-hop) for fun. He is also trying to join a gym but DHS has yet to make the funds available. Like nearly everyone his age, he is uncertain of what sort of career he'd like although is interested in becoming a psychiatric nurse or mental health worker: "they helped me a lot when I was in a psychiatric unit for a little while". He also wants to move back in with his Mother before he turns 18: "it's working well with mum. Have contact with dad but have not spoken for 2.5 years".

# CONCLUSIONS

This evaluation set out to identify and assess the effectiveness of Ramp in regard to outcomes and impact, determine whether broader program objectives have been met, provide feedback to DHS and Ramp on impediments or ways of improving program delivery and inform decisions regarding future funding.

The evaluation indicates that Whitelion and Reach have effectively established Ramp. The program uses an innovative approach to engaging young people with complex issues residing in residential care in the eastern suburbs in Melbourne. The program differs from other mentoring programs in using lead mentors to engage participants. It also involves young people in a range of activities including workshops and camps to provide opportunities to meet mentors and develop a sense of community through engaging with other young people and adults.

Nearly all participants have derived positive experiences through engagement with Ramp. For the majority, Ramp provides a safe and inclusive environment. Not all participants want a mentor, at least not initially, and Ramp provides opportunities for these young people also to participate and achieve positive change. The evaluation demonstrates that Ramp provides a diverse range of activities for young people, particularly those with mentors. Comments from young people participating in Ramp indicate that Ramp provides a stimulating and inspiring experience.

The low turnover and high satisfaction amongst mentors, and the duration of matches established, provides evidence of good selection, training and support for mentors and a careful matching process. Unlike many other mentoring programs, Ramp exposes participants to a variety of role models, not just their mentor. Initially some choose not to be matched, but a number change their mind, indicating that they see value in forming a trusting relationship with another, older person. While potential mentors are often introduced to participants at the residential care unit or at activities, potential mentors and mentees are encouraged to determine for themselves whether the match is one they are prepared to commit to, in part through having a trialing process. Matches appear to be successful when mentors 'are there' for their mentees, when they devote time to their mentee, and when they allow the relationship to develop at the mentee's pace. Mentors provide support to mentees in many ways – doing things with them, supporting and encouraging them, and providing practical support.

Ramp staff, mentors, and the young people themselves all indicated that participants showed improved self-awareness, self-esteem and confidence as a result of participation in the program. Comments from mentors and participants demonstrated that participants also had improved interpersonal and communication skills and some participants accessed other programs within Whitelion or Reach.

Feedback indicates that participants are better placed to take responsibility for and control their future than they were prior to entering the program. Many have new, more positive social connections. Increased confidence and openness will assist participants in relating to others who have the capacity to assist them to achieve their goals as well as improving their motivation to prepare to engage with education, training or employment. Some participants are taking steps towards this; however, for many, this is unlikely to occur in the short-term.

Some recommendations are made to assist Ramp to encourage young people's involvement and form improved relationships with providers of residential care and DHS case managers.

To quote some concluding comments from participants:

- 'Just keep up the good work. It really helps, especially for kids having trouble at home or with school.'
- 'You can trust people that go there, you treat others as you want to be treated.'
- 'I love it, ... best thing in the world. It does a lot of good things for kids who deserve a lot more than they have.'
- 'Ramp is a friendly environment, those who don't have anyone to talk to should do it. I rate it 9 out of 10.'

And from mentors:

- 'There are so many young people in Ramp who have blossomed under the commitment of the Ramp crew. These people have gotten full time jobs, finished year 11, inspired others in the group to speak up, conquer their fears of doing something adventurous or speaking in front of a group of people, have formed significant relationships with their mentors, have become leaders themselves. It has been an amazing journey to witness.'
- '... whether in measurable identifiable ways or more indefinable ways, Ramp clearly has a significant impact on young peoples lives ...'
- '...across the board I see such an overwhelming difference in some of the most at risk youth in the program over the years I have been involved. It is inspiring to see.'
- 'I am touched by the positive influence I see that Ramp is having on young people who have suffered from (sometimes severely) dysfunctional family and friend based relationships. My take on the Ramp program is that it is somewhere safe and creative that is enjoyed by the young people (and mentors) that attend. The result of this is that the young people are becoming more confident and positive on how they approach their lives.'

A residential care worker commented:

- 'Ramp is a great program that has enormous potential over time. Young people are guarded and it does take patience and time to engage them – I believe in future we will see more results of the great work being done.'

And finally, a DHS protective worker commented:

- 'It is fantastic that a program such as Ramp exists for young people in out of home care. Keep up the great work!'

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# ATTACHMENT 1 – EVALUATION FRAMEWORK



The DHS Project Brief (March 2007) defines the objectives of the evaluation as to:

- Identify and assess the effectiveness and efficiency of Ramp in regard to outcomes and impact.
- Determine whether the broader Ramp objectives are being met.
- Provide feedback to DHS and Ramp on any impediments or ways of improving program delivery.
- Inform decisions regarding future funding of the program.

In order to meet these objectives, the following aspects of the program will need to be assessed:

- Process - program inputs (e.g. staff, costs etc) and outputs (e.g. matches, activities etc).
- Impact - extent to which the outputs have contributed towards achievement of Ramp objectives.

The table below proposes a structure for the evaluation, including the specific questions that we will endeavour to answer and the manner in which this will be accomplished:

## Process

RAMP OBJECTIVE	EVALUATION QUESTION	INDICATOR	DATA SOURCE
<p><b>Objective 1</b> To establish and pilot a new approach to working with young people ('at the hard end') in residential care</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What is the background/context for the Ramp program?</li> <li>▪ Who is the target group?</li> <li>▪ What are the key strategies employed?</li> <li>▪ How are these different to other mentoring programs?</li> <li>▪ What are the relative strengths of the differentiating strategies?</li> <li>▪ What is the program cost structure?</li> <li>▪ How do Ramp costs compare with the costs of other mentoring programs?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Description of program genesis</li> <li>▪ Program Logic statement</li> <li>▪ Compare other mentoring programs</li> <li>▪ Number/type of program activities</li> <li>▪ Participant profile (age, gender, CALD, High Risk Adlc. schedule)</li> <li>▪ Number of young people engaged; number matched; how long (months)</li> <li>▪ Unit cost per young person engaged</li> <li>▪ Overall program cost (\$ PA)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Brief literature review</li> <li>▪ Whelion/Reach documentation</li> <li>▪ DHS funding agreement</li> <li>▪ House Visit Report forms</li> <li>▪ Program budget/financial reports</li> <li>▪ Project start/finish dates</li> <li>▪ Expenditure reports from other programs (source?)</li> <li>▪ Quarterly activity reports</li> <li>▪ Interviews with Ramp program staff</li> <li>▪ Interviews with DHS</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective 2</b> To provide participants with a positive experience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Did Ramp provide a safe, inclusive environment where participants felt comfortable engaging in activities?</li> <li>▪ Did the structured workshop format and/or other activities assist to engage young people?</li> <li>▪ Did Ramp provide a diverse range of experiences/activities for young people?</li> <li>▪ Did the young people find that Ramp provided a stimulating and inspiring experience?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Number of residential units involved; number of residents participating</li> <li>▪ Strength of collaboration with residential staff/management</li> <li>▪ Number of structured workshops undertaken; attendance; description</li> <li>▪ Number and type of activities/house visits conducted (to allow development of relationships with mentors/lead mentors); record of participation/attendance</li> <li>▪ Camp(s) conducted; attendance</li> <li>▪ Characteristics of young people who did not engage with Ramp; reasons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Management/activity reports</li> <li>▪ House Visit Report forms</li> <li>▪ Attendance lists</li> <li>▪ Survey of lead mentors</li> <li>▪ Survey of residential staff</li> <li>▪ Interviews with young people</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective 3</b> To provide exposure to positive role models</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How were mentors selected and trained; how were they supervised/supported?</li> <li>▪ How else were young people exposed to positive role models (i.e. other members of the Ramp community)?</li> <li>▪ How were participants encouraged to interact and establish relationships?</li> <li>▪ How were positive role models defined?</li> <li>▪ How did Ramp ensure that it encouraged appropriate behaviour?</li> <li>▪ How did Ramp provide opportunities for young people to develop longer-term relationships with a mentor/other members of the Ramp community?</li> <li>▪ Factors in successful matches?</li> <li>▪ How did mentors provide young people?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Quality assurance processes</li> <li>▪ Number of mentors/other role models; demographics</li> <li>▪ Mentor experience</li> <li>▪ Number and length of matches</li> <li>▪ Effectiveness of screening and training</li> <li>▪ Mentor drop out rate</li> <li>▪ Number of match breakdowns</li> <li>▪ Number of young people unmatched</li> <li>▪ Mentor satisfaction</li> <li>▪ Young person satisfaction</li> <li>▪ Description of the range of relationships established by young people within the Ramp community</li> <li>▪ Range of ways in which young people were supported</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Program guidelines</li> <li>▪ Application Forms</li> <li>▪ Training attendance lists</li> <li>▪ Mentor files</li> <li>▪ Survey of mentors</li> <li>▪ Focus group of lead mentors/Ramp program staff</li> <li>▪ Interviews with young people</li> </ul>

# Impact

RAMP OBJECTIVE	EVALUATION QUESTION	INDICATOR	DATA SOURCE
<p><b>Objective 4</b> To promote personal development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Were young people able to develop better self-awareness?</li> <li>▪ Were young people able to develop improved self-confidence/self-esteem?</li> <li>▪ Were young people able to develop better interpersonal and communication skills?</li> <li>▪ How did Ramp facilitate access to other programs within Whitelion/Reach?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Regular contact maintained with mentor</li> <li>▪ Young people volunteer information about themselves</li> <li>▪ Young people identify a positive role model</li> <li>▪ Young people express optimism after activities; report positive experiences</li> <li>▪ Improved/changed behaviour</li> <li>▪ Number and type of other programs (Whitelion and Reach) accessed</li> <li>▪ Established network of people that participants can connect with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interviews with young people</li> <li>▪ Survey of residential care staff</li> <li>▪ Survey of mentors</li> <li>▪ Client file review (DHS)</li> <li>▪ Surveys of DHS protective workers</li> <li>▪ Lead mentor/Ramp staff focus group</li> <li>▪ Post camp/workshop evaluation forms</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective 5</b> To encourage participants to take responsibility for and control their future</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To what extent has Ramp improved the social connectedness of young people?</li> <li>▪ To what extent has Ramp improved young people's skills in relating to people, agencies and key others who have the capacity to assist them to achieve goals?</li> <li>▪ To what extent has Ramp improved young people's motivation and preparation to (re)engage with education, training and/or employment?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Regular contact maintained with mentor</li> <li>▪ Capacity to articulate future plans</li> <li>▪ Awareness of education, training and employment possibilities</li> <li>▪ Participation in positive social and recreational activities</li> <li>▪ Relationships with family and peers</li> <li>▪ Relationships with residential care staff</li> <li>▪ Level of misuse of alcohol/other substances</li> <li>▪ Improved school attendance/workforce participation</li> <li>▪ New connections within the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interviews with young people</li> <li>▪ Survey of residential care staff</li> <li>▪ Survey of mentors</li> <li>▪ Client file review (DHS)</li> <li>▪ Surveys of DHS protective workers</li> <li>▪ Case Studies</li> </ul>