



EDMUND RICE EDUCATION  
AUSTRALIA

Youth 

# Wollongong Flexible Learning Centre

450 Princes Highway Towradgi NSW 2519

## ANNUAL REPORT 2013

This annual report for 2013 is published to provide information about the Wollongong Flexible Learning Centre for parents/carers, young people and other interested parties. This report contains the detail mandated by the Commonwealth and State Governments and Edmund Rice Education Australia reporting requirements.



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## INTRODUCTION

Wollongong Flexible Learning Centre (FLC) is a part of Edmund Rice Education Australia Youth+ and is conducted in accordance with the Youth+ philosophy and principles. Wollongong FLC commenced operation as a registered Non-State School in 2013 and is part of a national association (EREA) of forty-eight schools which includes, in 2013, fourteen Flexible Learning Centres.

The philosophy of the Wollongong FLC draws on the spirit and vision of Edmund Rice Education Australia and is grounded in the Edmund Rice Education Australia Charter document. (see [www.erea.edu.au](http://www.erea.edu.au)) The document has a clear commitment to social justice and stands in solidarity with disenfranchised young people of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds, inclusive communities, liberating education and gospel spirituality. The philosophy also has a practical focus, based in the application of four core principles of “Respect” (for self, others and environment), “Safe and Legal” environment, “Participation” (have a go) and “Honesty” (being fair dinkum) among all participants of the Wollongong FLC. This is evident in the ways the organisational culture and practices are shaped through the application of these principles. In essence, the principles establish a “common ground” among staff, young people and parents, a collective forum, where the means to resolve conflict, negotiate learning, recognise rights, responsibilities and consequences are modelled and explored, both within the group, and individually and as members of the broader community.

The 2008 Melbourne Declaration on the Education Goals for Young Australians states that “Australian Governments commit to working with all school sectors to

- Close the gap for young indigenous Australians
- Provide targeted support to disadvantaged students
- Focus on school improvement in low socioeconomic areas”

Wollongong FLC works with young people who are vulnerable and experience a complexity of inter-related needs. Participation and retention are key elements in the philosophy of Wollongong FLC, and the development of moral reasoning through the application of the four principles prepares young people for responsible citizenship. The learning experiences also build self-confidence and esteem in young people, promote an optimistic view of their potentialities and future, and assist them to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to enjoy a healthy and fulfilling life.

Wollongong Flexible Learning Centre offers an inclusive and non-discriminating learning community to young people, who for a variety of reasons, are disenfranchised from mainstream education. Young people are enrolled from both genders, from a variety of language, cultural and religious backgrounds, with particular sensitivity to Indigenous culture, and from backgrounds of socio-economic disadvantage. Young people are exposed to learning experiences that develop understanding and appreciation of the diverse cultural values that constitute Australian society. Learning is focused around the individual needs of young people and progress is carefully documented and monitored. Young people, in conjunction with their teachers and youth workers, draft learning plans with articulated education pathways.

## YOUTH+ FOUNDATION STATEMENT

Youth+ seeks to respond to the needs of young people disenfranchised and disengaged from education. Youth+ provides a place and an opportunity to re-engage in a suitable, flexible learning environment.

Youth+ seeks to build honest and authentic relationships with young people, their families and communities, supporting and celebrating the uniqueness and dignity of each person.

Youth+ is guided by the vision of Edmund Rice about the empowering service of education, to achieve personal and community liberation through educational experiences that enable transformation.

## BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES

Wollongong Flexible Learning Centre identifies a number of best practice guidelines supportive of meaningful socially inclusive educational experiences. While not exhaustive, the following provide a basis for programming and young person support.

### ***Individualised Education Program***

Education programs are attuned to the individual young person by an assessment of need and delivery within a supportive environment that will re-engage the young person with learning and encourage a sense of community. Personal Learning Plans are developed and negotiated with young people and form an integral part of daily learning programs.

### ***Diagnostic Testing***

Upon enrolment, all young people complete Compass testing in literacy and numeracy. Compass is a computer based assessment of core literacy and numeracy skills developed by ACER. It is specifically designed for disengaged and educationally marginalised young people and adults.

Compass provides an assessment of literacy and numeracy that can be delivered in a flexible, non-intimidating test environment. Testing does not have to take place in an educational setting. This assists with assessing those disengaged from education as traditional forms of testing can act as a barrier towards reengagement with formal learning.

Compass is aligned to the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF), the common national reference point for describing performance in the core skill areas.

Compass testing provides vital information for teachers in creating appropriate adjustments to the learning plan for individual young people. It is a key component of the Personal Learning Plan.

## **PERSONAL LEARNING PLANS**

Every young person develops a Personal Learning Plan in collaboration with their carers and key workers at the school. Personal Learning Plans are a means for young people to negotiate and articulate their learning, socio-emotional and personal needs and goals. Personal Learning Plans are informed by diagnostic testing in literacy and numeracy. They are dynamic documents that respond to the changing contexts of young people as they progress through stages of life. The Personal Learning Plans are revisited frequently throughout the year. Personal learning plans provide valuable information for teachers as they develop learning programs that are engaging and relevant to the young person. Importantly, they also guide the development of appropriate adjustments in the learning program.

## **YOUNG PERSON SUPPORT**

Young People are encouraged to make a commitment to the program and its principles. Young Person achievement is valued and celebrated with appropriate recognition by workers and young people.

## **FAMILY/CARER INVOLVEMENT**

Families are viewed as partners in their children's educational experience. While family circumstances may be related to young people's alienation, the importance of building positive family relationships is a priority.

## **LEARNING CHOICES**

The school's educational approach includes flexible timetabling, smaller learning groups, strong staff/young people relationships and relevant curriculum. This enables the delivery of creative responses to the learning needs of the individual young person, incorporating their cultural and spiritual backgrounds. The school's learning programs comply with NSW Board of Studies Mandatory Course requirements for Stage 4 and 5 of schooling. Courses are delivered in an integrated mode, with a strong emphasis on providing meaningful and engaging learning.

## **MULTI DISCIPLINARY TEAMS**

Team members use a multi disciplinary approach to provide health, educational, cultural, social and emotional support for young people. Educational, community and allied health professional are encouraged to collaborate closely to provide wrap around care for the young person. Information is shared and expertise is respected. Appropriate team members are encouraged to develop links with external support agencies (e.g. Child and Youth Mental Health Services, Drug & Alcohol services, accommodation services, counseling services). Staff selection processes identify staff members who are flexible, are able to relate to young people, are willing to negotiate, and are clear about operation by principles

## SCHOOL PROFILE AS AT AUGUST CENSUS 2013

The total 2013 enrolment of the Wollongong FLC in full time equivalent young people is shown below.

Gender/Year	7	8	9	10	Total
Male	2	1	8	7	18
Female	1	4	8	8	21
Total	3	5	16	15	39

## YOUNG PERSON SUPPORT

Each young person at Wollongong Flexible Learning Centre has a Community Group with a Community Group Leader. The role of the Community Group Leader team is to establish a close relationship to the young person, to monitor their progress, to advocate on their behalf, to provide advice, direction and support during difficult personal issues, and overall to support the young person to achieve their stated personal and educational goals. The role is broad in scope, in-depth in its substance, and long-term in relationship. It includes:

- In-house mentoring and advocacy
- Supporting the young person and their families in times of emotional crisis or practical need
- Maintaining the close partnership between school, young person and parent/carer
- Working in partnership with other agencies who are involved with young people e.g. Department of Child Safety, Youth Justice, Indigenous Health services, Community Agencies etc
- Supporting and mentoring young people who live independently
- Helping young people to build capacity and resilience in social and emotional aspects of their lives
- Informally helping young people develop positive self-concept
- Supporting young people with issues of drug misuse and self harm
- monitoring and supporting young person's achievement and progress towards achieving the goals articulated in their Personal Learning Plan
- overseeing appropriate adjustments to learning programs in line with the Personal Learning Plan

## CURRICULUM

The Wollongong FLC provides holistic learning experiences that address the social needs of young people, and promotes their emotional, cognitive, spiritual and academic development. Learning programs are developed with the intention to:

- empower young people to take personal responsibility for their learning
- support young people to become independent learners
- address deficits or gaps in literacy and numeracy

- develop in young people the skills of twenty first century learners including collaboration, innovation and knowledge creation,
- recognize and celebrate the skills and knowledge of young people,
- enable young people to experience challenge within a safe and supportive learning environment
- provide a sense of achievement that is relevant and authentic to the real world.

Learning experiences address NSW Board of Studies Mandatory Courses for Year Seven to Ten, with a strong focus on Literacy and Numeracy. This year, teachers have begun to implement the Australian Curriculum in English, Mathematics and Science, and there is particular emphasis on the General Capabilities of the Australian Curriculum.

Importantly young people are encouraged to participate in decision making processes that affect the school community, their own lives and the society in which they live.

Subjects offered at various year levels include:

NSW BOS Mandatory Courses	
Stage 4	English, Mathematics, Science, Health and Physical Education, Geography, History, Music, Visual Arts, Technology and Applied Studies
Stage 5	English, Mathematics, Science, Health and Physical Education, Geography, History,
VET Courses	
Certificate I in Information Technology	

## OUTCOMES

- One student completed NAPLAN tests in 2013. All other eligible students were withdrawn by their parents or carers.
- Some students completed competencies in the Certificate 1 in Information Technology.

## APPARENT STUDENT RETENTION RATE

As this is the first year of operation for the school the apparent student retention rate cannot be calculated.

## ATTENDANCE RATE

The average student attendance rate for 2013 was 76%. This number excludes students who terminated enrolment during the year or who were absent for extended explained absences.

## **SPECIAL PROGRAMS THAT PRODUCE IMPROVED OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS**

The following programs achieve improved outcomes for students at the Centre.

### ***PCYC Program***

Wollongong Flexible Learning Centre has a strong partnership with North Wollongong and Bulli PCYC. This program offers membership to the PCYC for all students. The programs available are;

- boys active
- girls active
- boxing

### ***Project Warrior***

The school accesses a local gym to engage in strength and fitness training. This program is enhanced to include leadership and personal challenge activities.

### ***Access Community Group Community Garden***

Small groups of young people attend a local community organization to work with volunteers in the community garden. This also enables young people to connect with youth services at the centre.

### ***Induction Program***

Upon enrolment, young people attend a two day course to orient them to life at the flexi school. These two days have a strong focus on Operation by Principles, community development and team skills.

### ***Personal Challenge Program***

Young people set personal goals for themselves as part of the PLP process, and then choose from a range of personal challenge activities that will allow them to demonstrate new skills in a supported environment.

### ***Outdoor Education Program***

Young people are encouraged to utilize the local environment including bush settings, river adventures and ocean activities as part of an enriching outdoor education program. Activities are designed to build resilience, trust and team work among participants.

## ***Check-in / Check-out Program***

Each day the community conducts an extended check-in session at the beginning of the day. This session allows young people to share issues of concern, address problems, air grievances and communicate openly with staff. It also allows days of significance to be marked, celebrated and discussed, for example International Women's Day. A shorter check out session is held at the day's conclusion. The check out session is an opportunity to reflect on the day's events and celebrate individual and community achievements. This program produces positive outcomes in young people's ability to negotiate and communicate, to think critically, to make decisions and to build their social capability.

## **STAFF DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES 2013**

Wollongong FLC is committed to the ongoing professional development and formation of staff. This continues to enrich the educational opportunities provided for our young people and models to our young people the modern reality of lifelong learning. The following priorities were identified in the Centre's 2013 Operational Plan:

- Individual reflective supervision – available to all staff
- Termly practice conversation – all teaching staff
- New Staff Days – all staff
- Child Protection Training – all staff
- Whole of staff days – all staff
- Technology ICT training – 2 staff
- Smoking Cessation Conference – one staff
- Technology of Participation – all Staff
- Certificate IV Trainer and Assessor – one staff
- Curriculum Planning Days – all staff
- Head of Campus training days – one staff (HOC)

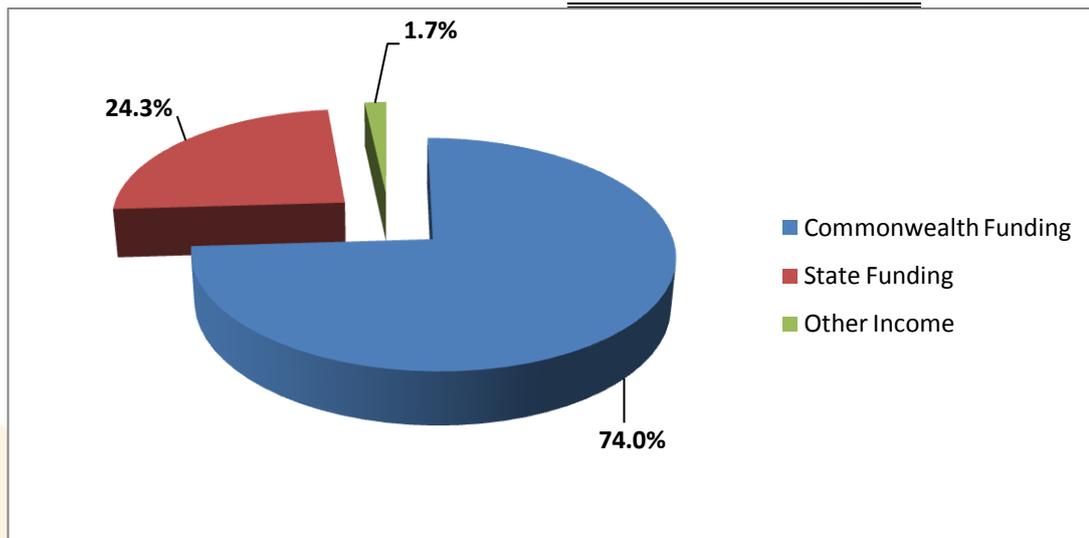
The average spent per teacher in professional training for 2013 was \$1800.

## FINANCES

The distribution of funding sources for the Wollongong FLC is summarised below.

### Funding Details - Wollongong FLC

	%	\$
Commonwealth Funding	74.0%	432,512
State Funding	24.3%	141,688
Other Income	1.7%	10,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>584,200</b>



## THE SOCIAL CLIMATE OF THE CENTRE

One hallmark of Wollongong Flexible Learning Centre is the very real climate of compassionate care evident. This is expressed through:

- Strengths based practice
- Community Groups
- Home Visits
- Youth Worker
- Transition planning from Wollongong FLC
- Induction to Wollongong FLC

## STRATEGIES USED FOR INVOLVING PARENTS / CARERS IN THE EDUCATION OF THEIR YOUNG PERSON.

Wollongong FLC recognises that parents/carers are the primary educators of their young people. Many young people live independently. The work of the school is most successful when it collaborates effectively with parents/carers. The Flexible Learning Centre supports and encourages this role of parents/carers through:

- Information evenings,
- Newsletters
- Cultural celebrations
- Parents/carer meetings and
- Social celebrations.

## STAFF

The staff of Wollongong FLC are a highly qualified, experienced and generous group of professionals who consistently contributes more than would otherwise be expected both within the classroom and beyond. The distinctive skills/qualifications and experience of our staff include:

<b>Total number of teachers</b>	4
<b>Total number of youth workers</b>	1
<b>Total number of Support staff</b>	1
<b>Total Number of Staff</b>	6

<b>Teaching Staff Qualifications</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b>Masters Degree</b>	1
<b>Diploma</b>	2
<b>Certificate</b>	2
<b>Doctorate</b>	0
<b>Degree</b>	5

The average attendance rate for teachers in the 2013 academic year was 96%. This figure reflects a low rate of sick leave among the staff. This figure does not include staff absent from classes attending professional development activities or who would have been replaced whilst on other forms of leave such as long service or maternity leave.

The teaching staff retention rate expressed as a percentage is 86%. This indicates the percentage of teachers who have continued service at the school for the whole of the 2013 school year.

## 2013 MILESTONES

- successful registration with NSW Board of Studies as a special assistance school with a registration period of 5 years.
- significant increase in enrolments

- establishment of the school as an entity in it's own right
- appointment of a new team of teachers, youth workers and support workers
- Fundraising for Jeans for Genes Day, Asthma Foundation
- participated in 'Connie the Condom Dress' raising awareness of high rates of STIs in young people
- composition of our school song 'Get Down on the Common Ground'

## GOALS FOR THE 2014 YEAR

In 2014 emphasis will be given to:

- The further development of teaching program that integrate the Australian Curriculum
- Building of the transition program for young people leaving Wollongong FLC
- Refinement of the Young Person Induction program
- Build community connections, particularly locally
- Strengthen therapeutic and intervention roles
- Clarify and strengthen an appropriate work experience program
- Offer more VET qualifications. i.e. Certificate 1 & 2 in Literacy.

## CONCLUSION

The Wollongong FLC continues to offer an education option for those who through marginalisation cannot access a standardised education. Wollongong FLC maintains an inclusive community and works to provide care, hope and socialisation skills as well as an academic learning program. We aim to build upon the successes of the past to realise our vision of the future.

Signature  
Head of Campus  
Wollongong Flexible Learning Centre

Signature  
Principal  
Edmund Rice Education Flexible Learning Centre Network