

# Evolution

Re-engaging young people through the visual arts



ArtPlay Backyard

City Beats

Evolution

Signal 37

The ACCESS Program: An Australia Council for the Arts Creative Community Development Initiative



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au/news\\_and\\_activities/projects/artplay/the\\_access\\_program](http://education.unimelb.edu.au/news_and_activities/projects/artplay/the_access_program)

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## Contents

<b>4</b>	<b>Background</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Project Summary</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Research</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Participant Profile</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Access</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Engagement</b>
11	Role of the Artist
12	Role of the Youth Worker
<b>13</b>	<b>Creative and Artistic Practice</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>Social Connectedness and Cultural Citizenship</b>
<b>17</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
<b>18</b>	<b>Participant Survey</b>
<b>22</b>	<b>Appendix: The Evolution Partners</b>

For some young people, the beginning of another day of Evolution workshops starts with an encouraging phone call from the youth worker. Eventually they arrive at Signal, a public arts studio housed in an old train signal box, situated amongst the comings and goings of white-collar professionals, skateboarders and busy train lines. In the studio several tables are pushed together to create one large workspace, surrounded by windows on three sides, looking out on the nearby Yarra river and cityscape. As each young person arrives they move laconically, some with headphones on, to their usual spot in the studio. Greeted casually by both the artist and the youth worker, slowly everyone gets back to art making.



## Background

Located in the heart of the city alongside the main river precinct, Signal provides a studio space for young people aged 13 – 22. It offers a wide variety of free creative arts workshops that enable young people to develop their skills and interests by working alongside commissioned professional artists.<sup>1</sup>

The City of Melbourne's youth policy report, Empowering Young People - Young People Policy (2010 -13)<sup>2</sup> outlined a plan to enhance the status and wellbeing of twelve to twenty-five year olds. In response to this plan The Capital City Local Learning Employment (City LLEN) service identified that Melbourne's marginalized, homeless or at risk youth required "shorter, part time

programs that provide learning and re-engagement strategies that act as a precursor to further education, training and employment."<sup>3</sup> To act on this issue a partnership was formed in 2009 between City LLEN, Signal, the Melbourne City Mission (MCM), Frontyard Youth Services and the Inner Melbourne VET Cluster (IMVC) – Youth Connections Program.<sup>4</sup> This partnership (see Appendix) led to the establishment of Evolution, a free and artist supported visual arts-based project that set out to engage homeless, marginalized, and at risk young people aged fifteen to twenty two years. Evolution was to "provide a flexible and tailored transition project"<sup>5</sup>, one that would support young people to develop a belief in their own capacities, achievements and skills in the creative arts.



1. <http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/signal/Pages/Signal.aspx>

2. City of Melbourne. "Empowering Young People: Young People's Policy 2010 - 2013." (2010), <http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/AboutCouncil/Meetings/Lists/CouncilMeetingAgendaItems/Attachments/8117/5.6.pdf>. page 9

3. Evolution program proposal June 2010 City LLEN page 2

4. CityLLEN [www.ccllen.org.au](http://www.ccllen.org.au); Frontyard Youth Services [www.melbournecitymission.org.au/What-We-Do/Our-Programs-Services/Frontyard](http://www.melbournecitymission.org.au/What-We-Do/Our-Programs-Services/Frontyard); Inner Melbourne VET Cluster [www.imvc.com.au](http://www.imvc.com.au)

5. City LLEN Evolution program proposal June 2010, page 6

Signal was regarded as an ideal venue for Evolution as it provided a central location, close to transport, familiar settings, and an environment associated with professional arts practice. Evolution was the first project of its type Signal had offered and it provided an opportunity to broaden the organisation's network and accessibility. Evolution was first offered in December 2010 and, as of June 2012, has run for five project cycles engaging thirty-one young people aged from fifteen to twenty-two years.

This project forms part of a larger initiative entitled the ACCESS Program funded by the Australian Council for the Arts.<sup>6</sup>

A central belief underpinning Evolution is that, "art and the creative processes have the capacity to attract disengaged young people who would otherwise not consider, or be ready, to commit to structured education or training."<sup>7</sup> Simply put by the Frontyard Youth Worker, who was actively involved throughout the project, "It (art) can be a way they [young people] can connect other things that are going on in their lives."

The project had a range of objectives:

- To provide a flexible creative transition program tailored to individual needs
- To assist in bolstering the protective factors that ward against youth disconnection
- To assist in increasing the participant's engagements with school, vocational training and employment
- To assist in breaking down possible barriers to education, training and employment
- To engage young people creatively through art
- To provide a safe place for young people where they can express themselves, and
- To provide clear role models and mentors that actively engage participants

The completion of the Evolution program does not grant young people any formal certification. This would have been at odds with the ambition for the project which was to provide an "flexible" model "open to incorporating a range of pedagogical approaches that can more easily occur when the training is not accredited."<sup>8</sup>

## Project Summary

Evolution targeted young people aged 15 to 22 years who were not currently studying or employed and restricted by diverse, and sometimes severe, health and social issues. Small groups, ranging from four to eight participants undertook an eight to ten week program scheduled two days a week, working alongside artist Clare McCracken. The participants were introduced to a wide range of creative experiences including visual art, design, film/video, animation and photography and at the conclusion of each cycle an exhibition of their work was held at Signal.

A youth worker, Belinda Biffin from Frontyard youth services, was largely responsible for recruiting participants and attended every Evolution session. Importantly the youth worker co-participated in the workshops and provided a regular and consistent point of contact for the young people, both before and after each workshop, and for several months after the completion of the program. Further support for the participants and the broader coordination of the Evolution project was provided by Amanda Haskard the ACCESS Coordinator.<sup>9</sup>



6. For more information see the ACCESS Program at [http://education.unimelb.edu.au/news\\_and\\_activities/projects/artplay/the\\_access\\_program](http://education.unimelb.edu.au/news_and_activities/projects/artplay/the_access_program)

7. City LLEN Evolution program proposal June 2010, page 2

8. City LLEN Evolution program proposal June 2010, page 2

9. The ACCESS Signal Coordinator was employed as part of the larger ACCESS program. For more information go to the ACCESS Program Report [http://education.unimelb.edu.au/news\\_and\\_activities/projects/ArtPlay](http://education.unimelb.edu.au/news_and_activities/projects/ArtPlay)

All of the art materials and resources required are provided by Signal along with money for public transport and lunch. The workshop model aims to introduce young people to the freedom of working in a studio and developing their art over a sustained period with regular feedback. In consultation with the artist, they determine their own goals. There is no assessment, and they are free to come and go from the workshop as they please. Every two weeks the young people are expected to have finished a piece of work. The group exhibition provides a common goal for the young people to work toward and the opening is an opportunity for family and friends to support the participant in their interest and to conclude their involvement in Evolution. Young people are also able to negotiate sales of their work at the exhibition.

In summary,

- Thirty-one young people participated, spread across five cycles including 19 females and 12 males
- Each cycle involves two five-hour workshops per week undertaken over an eight to ten week period
- Each cycle included 5 to 12 participants, aged between 15 and 22, who were identified as disengaged from formal learning, unable to adhere to the social and cultural conventions of schools and other educational institutions
- Referrals to the Evolution project were informed by knowledge of young people's case histories
- Signal provided public travel cards and free lunch for participants
- The program structure and flexibility allowed young people to self-direct and negotiate their use of space, materials and resources
- The emphasis given to art-making focused attention on the participants' potential rather than their personal challenges
- A focus on non-intimidating, open-ended exploration was effectively balanced with the challenge of goal-directed art practice
- The program was planned to enable both short term and long term achievements
- The group exhibition at the end of each cycle engaged participants with a common goal
- The open, informal and relaxed atmosphere of the workshop activities supported participants to connect informally and socially with each other, the artist and the youth worker.



## Outcomes

*It's such a huge accomplishment for her to stick with a course for the whole time and see it through. Normally after one say, she will simply refuse to return. I can't tell you how many times she has dropped out of programs but I know she felt really comfortable and welcomed here.*<sup>10</sup>

- 31 of the 35 young people who enrolled completed the program
- 25 out of 31 young people have moved from Evolution onto further study or employment.
- Attendance rates of the five cycles: 1) 81 %, 2) 64%, 3) 64%, 4) 81% and 5) 59%
- Attendance rates are a strong indication of engagement given the backgrounds of participants
- Since the inception of Evolution referrals by youth services to the project have increased indicating a growing awareness by case workers of the value of such a program
- The program was acknowledged as an example of best practice in the Department of Human Services, Victoria, Good Practice Guide 2011
- The artist and youth worker, family members and Signal staff noted strongly that the Evolution project was effective for engaging and re-engaging young people
- The youth worker was central to recruitment, supporting attendance and maintaining communication with the participants between workshops and after the Project. Her role as co-creator rather than as acting solely as a monitor of participant engagement was important. This allowed her to make a stronger connection with young people whilst also tracking their progress. Follow up communication provided by the youth worker supported participant transition to further training and employment

10. Youth Support Worker



- The effective planning, development and continuous evaluation of each cycle relied strongly on clear communication and a positive and direct working partnership between the youth worker and the artist
- The diverse backgrounds and complex needs of participants required the artist and youth worker to create flexible and individualized learning programs for each participant. Workshop activities, which were tailored to individual interests and needs, engendered the confidence of participants to create, share, and express themselves through the visual arts
- Participants appreciated access to a dedicated and well resourced studio environment located in the central city
- The final exhibition promoted social relationships and a public acknowledgement of participant achievement
- The program gained funding from The NewsBoys Foundation funding to support the development of the program
- The program gained funding from the City of Melbourne and Frontyard Youth Services

## Research

The Evolution project presented an opportunity to document in situ and in detail, how young people responded to a visual arts program developed specifically for their interests. Information was gathered through observations, photographs and informal interviews. In addition a short participant survey was undertaken at the end of each program. At the time of reporting, there have been 5 program cycles undertaken and researched involving 31 participants of which 18 responded to the post program survey. Recorded interviews and discussions were undertaken with the artist, youth worker and members of the Evolution Advisory Committee. For more information on the research design for this project see the ACCESS Program Report.<sup>11</sup>



11. [http://education.unimelb.edu.au/news\\_and\\_activities/projects/artplay/the\\_access\\_program](http://education.unimelb.edu.au/news_and_activities/projects/artplay/the_access_program)



## Participant Profile



Restricted by a range of emotional, social and health challenges the young people referred to the Evolution project were identified as disengaged from formal learning, unable to adhere to the social and cultural conventions of schools and other educational institutions (See Evolution Participant Profile Table 5).

Cycle One involved five young people aged fifteen to twenty years, two male and three female and were considered 'low risk'.

Cycle Two participants were considered as 'high risk' by the youth worker, with some living in crisis accommodation, including one in transitional care and one in resident care. Two young people lived with family members who had been diagnosed with mental health issues. The young people aged fifteen to twenty-two years were slightly older than those in Cycle One and had been disengaged for some time from work and education contexts. The individual, and at times, high needs of the participants required personalized planning.

Cycle Three involved seven young people aged seventeen to twenty years, and included several who were attending an alternative school in inner Melbourne.<sup>12</sup> The students were required to sign a contract agreeing to attend school four days a week

while they attended Evolution on Wednesdays only. Their Evolution artworks fed into their VCE art folios.<sup>13</sup> The challenge noted by the artist for this cycle was to manage the individual and group dynamics created by the participation of an existing group of peers.

The group size for Cycle Four was kept deliberately small, guided by advice from the youth worker who had identified one member as having potentially challenging and complex needs, evident by past disruptive behaviours when involved in other support services. As predicted this participant, who was at times verbally abusive, required particular attention from both the artist and the youth worker. By the end of the eight weeks he was much more settled and focused on his art making. The focus on this individual reduced the one-to-one support given to the other members of the group who were nevertheless tolerant and accepting of the more difficult member.

Cycle Five got off to a slow start with the youth worker struggling to gain referrals. Compounding this challenge was the unavailability of the youth worker during a several week period of personal leave. Eventually, seven participants aged sixteen to twenty years came to participate, including several young women who had experienced similar bullying issues at school.

12. A small secondary government school that caters for students seeking an alternative to mainstream schooling.

13. The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) refers to the final year of pre-Tertiary study undertaken by the majority of young people in Victoria

## Access

The young people were notified about Evolution through various youth work services. The Frontyard youth worker reviewed referrals and met with each applicant to consider how the project matched their interests and aptitude for working with others already recruited in a program cycle. This process continued up until the first two weeks of each cycle.

As the project has become more established there has been a rise in the number of enquiries and requests from support workers and services interested in Evolution, and requests to be included on Frontyard's mailing list. Attracting young people for Cycle One posed a number of challenges. As the youth worker noted, "If it [the program] doesn't have a reputation, you struggle to get referrals." Eventually Belinda was able to encourage young people to attend and the number of participants throughout cycle one grew. Cycle Two participants became aware of the project through word of mouth and the project's reputation attracted a broader range of services interested in making referrals, including, The St Kilda Crisis Service, Shine for Kids, the McKillop Family Services along with a secondary school year nine coordinator.<sup>14</sup>

Relationship building by the youth worker, artist and ACCESS Coordinator all contributed to facilitating young peoples' entry points into the project. From the perspective of the youth worker, the "selling" point of project was that it "didn't feel like school and I tell them that they will be treated like an adult." The youth worker's role during Evolution sessions was to be an immediate contact for young people, available throughout each day of the project. Her consultation with each young person's support worker meant she had sound knowledge of participant needs and could manage their behaviour. Each young person signed a contract at the beginning of every cycle committing them to the full length of the project and appropriate behaviour. If a young person's interest in the project wavered, the youth worker would remind the participants of their initial commitment. With many of the young people starting the project with little or no routine, the youth worker often started the day by calling young people to wake them up on the morning of the sessions. When not monitoring them, she sat alongside them as a co-creator, making artwork and participating in discussion. The youth worker also exhibited her work at the end of each cycle. As the youth worker noted,

*My particular role is to try and get them here. Once they are here I have chosen to participate. If I am expecting them to try it I need to try it too!*

The ACCESS Coordinator, Amanda commented that the youth worker acted as a vital bridge between Signal and the youth worker services. From Amanda's perspective the effectiveness of the Evolution model was dependent on the youth workers' ability to pitch the project to the right audience, to work collaboratively alongside the artist, coordinator, and to be a constant in the project.



14. Youth worker

## Engagement

*We had a couple of young women who were quite anxious. It was like pulling teeth trying to get communication happening. Once Lucy felt safe and supported she was very open and in one workshop she was laughing, which was a big shift. That was great to see. There are big issues and barriers that they (the young participants) need to get over in order to feel comfortable.*<sup>15</sup>

Given the backgrounds on the young people invited to take part in the Evolution workshops, particularly their low levels of confidence and motivation, it was challenge to encourage them to both attend and then engage. Commonly disconnected from their families and other social support, attendance largely relied on the individual. For some participants simply motivating themselves to travel to Signal was a significant step. The reasons for disengaging from school, study or employment were complex, and it could take some time, or for some, the whole project and beyond to make steps to re-engage. Over the course of 2010 until June 2012, thirty-one young people completed the Evolution project with attendance rates, calculated by days of attendance (Table 1).<sup>16</sup>

From the perspective of the Frontyard Youth Services Manager, who was experienced with working with disengaged youth in a variety of programs, the Evolution attendance and completion rates were considered very high. The post project survey results (Tables 2) gathered from 18 of the 31 participants indicated a positive response to the project activities taking into account that over 50% of participants completed the survey.

One Evolution participant, Rowan, is a stand out example of personal engagement. Having struggled to adhere to deadlines and failed in his tertiary studies, Rowan was recommended to join Evolution by his teacher, who could see that the formal education system did not suit his learning needs. The flexible and relaxed nature of the environment complemented Rowan's approach to art making, and over the course of program his independence and confidence grew. He developed positive relationships with the Signal staff and since Evolution he has gone on to participate in Signal 37 and be selected as one of the six young people commissioned to produce public artworks as part of the Signal Screen Commission Project.

For some young people the experience of coming to Evolution generated significant re-engagement. As noted by the ACCESS Coordinator,

*Xavier was suffering from severe anxiety, even to come to the front door. Belinda was doing a lot of work pre-workshop trying to engage him. Once he came through the front door he came every week. His output for the exhibition was really great and he has gone on to be involved in a creative VCAL program looking at sound and visual art.*

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15. ACCESS Coordinator

16 Note that given the small number of participants, the absence of one young person for several workshop days (as was the case in Cycle Two and Three) impacted markedly on the final percentage.



## Role of the Artist

The diverse and potentially demanding needs of the young people involved in the project required flexibility and responsiveness on behalf of the artist, the youth worker and the ACCESS coordinator. From the outset the artist needed to work holistically with each individual, tailoring the activities to their interests while exposing them to new art forms. The ACCESS coordinator said,

*Clare was the best fit and had the right kind of personality and approach for working with young people. She was able to meet a young person where they were at and pull out little sparks.*

The relationship between the participants, artist and youth worker was open and relaxed. Participant comments included, "they are great and a great help," "I did feel supported, they are really easy to get along with" and "I was completely supported."

Many of the young people lacked confidence in self-directed learning and required encouragement to stay on task. To maintain concentration and focus the artist noted that she had to "constantly give them something to do. It is a very long day for some." The small number of participants per cycle and one-to-one interactions supported engagement. As the artist commented,

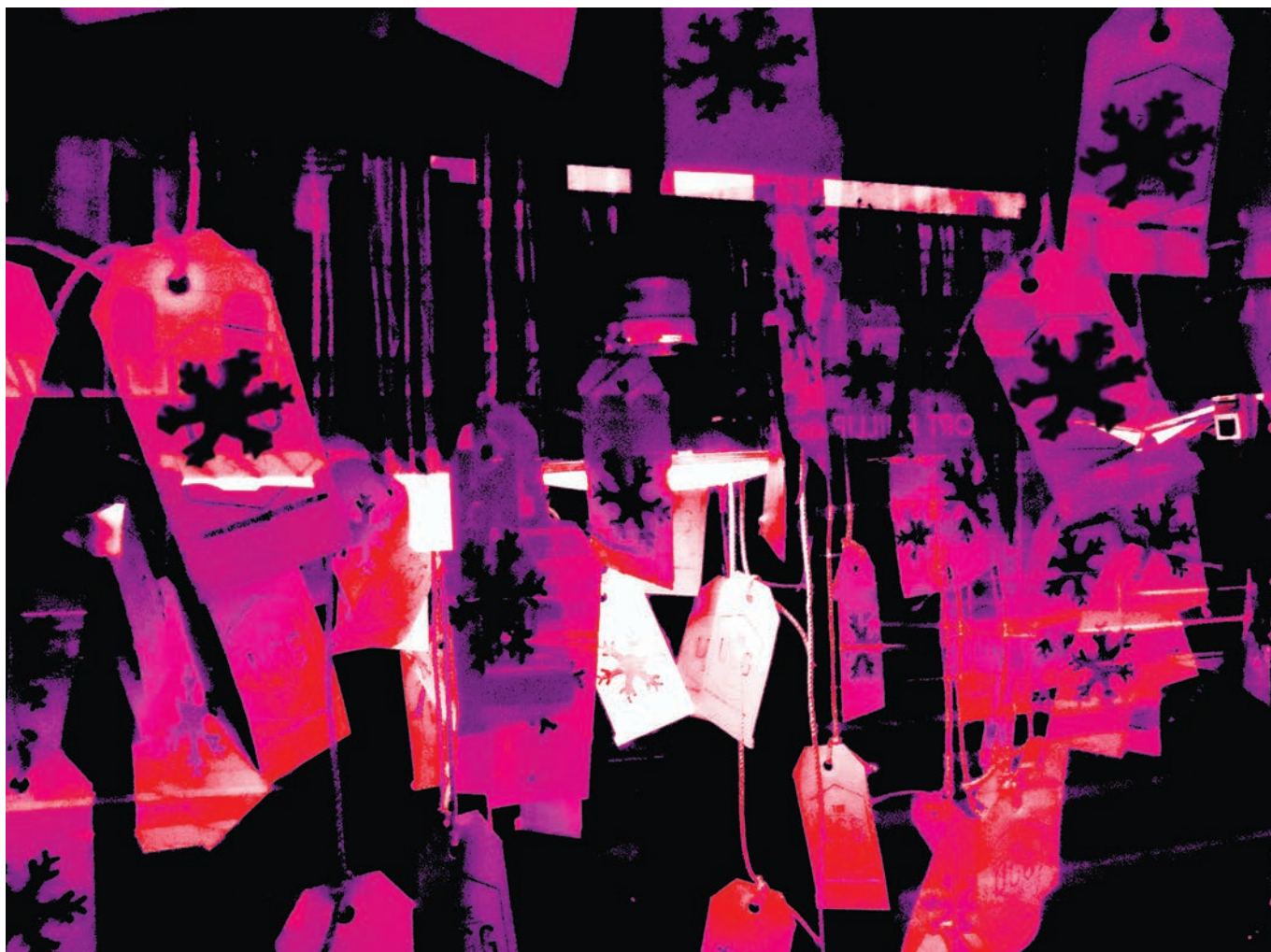
*The one-to-one attention was amazing ...because you could carry them through the tasks. I try as much as possible to make sure that once every fortnight they have a nice finished object they can be really proud of...If they can't see the outcome they don't respond.*

While the Evolution program was well resourced, there were still instances where participants became difficult to manage and required re-direction. The strategy largely adopted by the artist and youth worker was to create an emotionally supportive and respectful environment, one in which the young people felt in control and trusted. The artist noted,

*I think the dynamic that we initially set up, which is you are free to have a cigarette break when you want to...you are free to go to the bathroom when you want to, if you don't want to do a task, feel free to say you don't want to do it... tapping into the knowledge that they already have, giving them the responsibility, makes them feel like an adult.*

The young people, entrusted to take responsibility for their own actions, valued the Evolution experience. As one participant noted, "I like it, cause it doesn't feel like school, I hated everything about school but I like coming here, nobody hassles you, don't get treated like a baby."

*When George first arrived he was really anxious and always looking out of the corner of his eye, he expected me to constantly be telling him off. He had a lot of behavioural issues that would never work in the school system, like compulsive tagging. But, by that last workshop he had become really calm and starting to grab his own materials and he played on the computer all day to make his flip book and felt really comfortable exploring. To me that was great to see. Artist*



Artwork by Evolution participant Tayla

## Role of the Youth Worker

The youth worker was vital in providing direct and informed support, reassuring participants when required. Her roles included developing ongoing relationships and working closely with project partners. Belinda was largely responsible for recruiting the young people via referrals gained from other youth services such as MacKillop Family services, Salvation Army and Mission Australia. Following this she interviewed applicants considered suited to the Evolution project. Once accepted, she liaised with the young people and their support workers. Her involvement extended to include regular communication with the participants throughout the project, often giving emotional support and professional advice. For example, she telephoned many of the young people on the morning of each workshop, to remind them to attend. At times such encouragement was crucial. As one participant frankly noted, "I woke up and was going to get smashed but decided to come here instead." She refers the young people onto other support services for specific help if needed.

Co-creating alongside others enabled the youth worker to interact informally and be available for support if required. Her knowledge of the backgrounds of the young people informed the artist. Importantly Belinda maintained contact with many of the young people after completing Evolution, which aided their transition into employment, further study or training. The importance of this ongoing communication was noted by the ACCESS coordinator who stated, "We (Signal) are about re-engagement. Frontyard is about the long-term support options, which is why Frontyard are a key partner in delivering this program."



## Creative and Artistic Practice

*If this ran at Frontyard it wouldn't run as well. I don't think young people would turn up, even though they feel comfortable at Frontyard. They behave slightly differently in this space. I think they respect the [Signal] space. You get to see the other side here.* Youth worker

Working in a dedicated arts space indicated to the participants that artistic practice was the focus for the eight-week project. This goal was validated by the opportunity to work alongside a professional artist whose focus is not on the young people's mental health or past disengagement issues, but instead on their capacity to make art. This is highlighted in the final exhibition of each cycle, which included a wide range of professionally finished individual artworks, several of which were purchased by the City of Melbourne.

The key factor in promoting creative and artistic practice amongst the young people was artist encouragement, responsiveness and modelling. The ACCESS coordinator commented, "In terms of their artistic practice the artist has been a co-creator and supports everybody's needs and development."

Young people were given the choice and freedom to decide what pace to work at, what to work on and how much to explore, while gently provided with boundaries, skill-focused instruction, timeframes and non-directive mentoring from the artist. Clare observed that often in the first week of a cycle, the young people would push the boundaries. Her response was to communicate that it was ultimately up to participants what they achieved, and to do so they needed to make an investment and act respectfully to others. Adopting a Socratic approach to questioning and discussion, commonly referenced to examples of professional artworks, the artist drew out the young people's aspirations and uncertainties. The artist encouraged the participants to explore their ideas through media experimentation, art image searches and photography undertaken in city environs. Clare observed,

*Rather than standing in front of them and talking about the colour wheel or talking about how to use their pencils I let them experiment and then, for example, one to one I'll say 'do you realize there are harder leads and there are softer leads?'*

Implicit in Clare's interactions was trust in the capacities of the young people to determine and meet their own goals.

Much of this creative inquiry was documented in visual diaries, providing a basis for the artist and other group members to consider and comment on, an exchange that supported artistic development. Every two weeks the artist expected the young people to have something well completed. The artist was guided by the belief that young people wanted to achieve something "glossy" that they associated with professional art in order to gain a greater sense of pride in their work when they made something that "steps up a few levels".

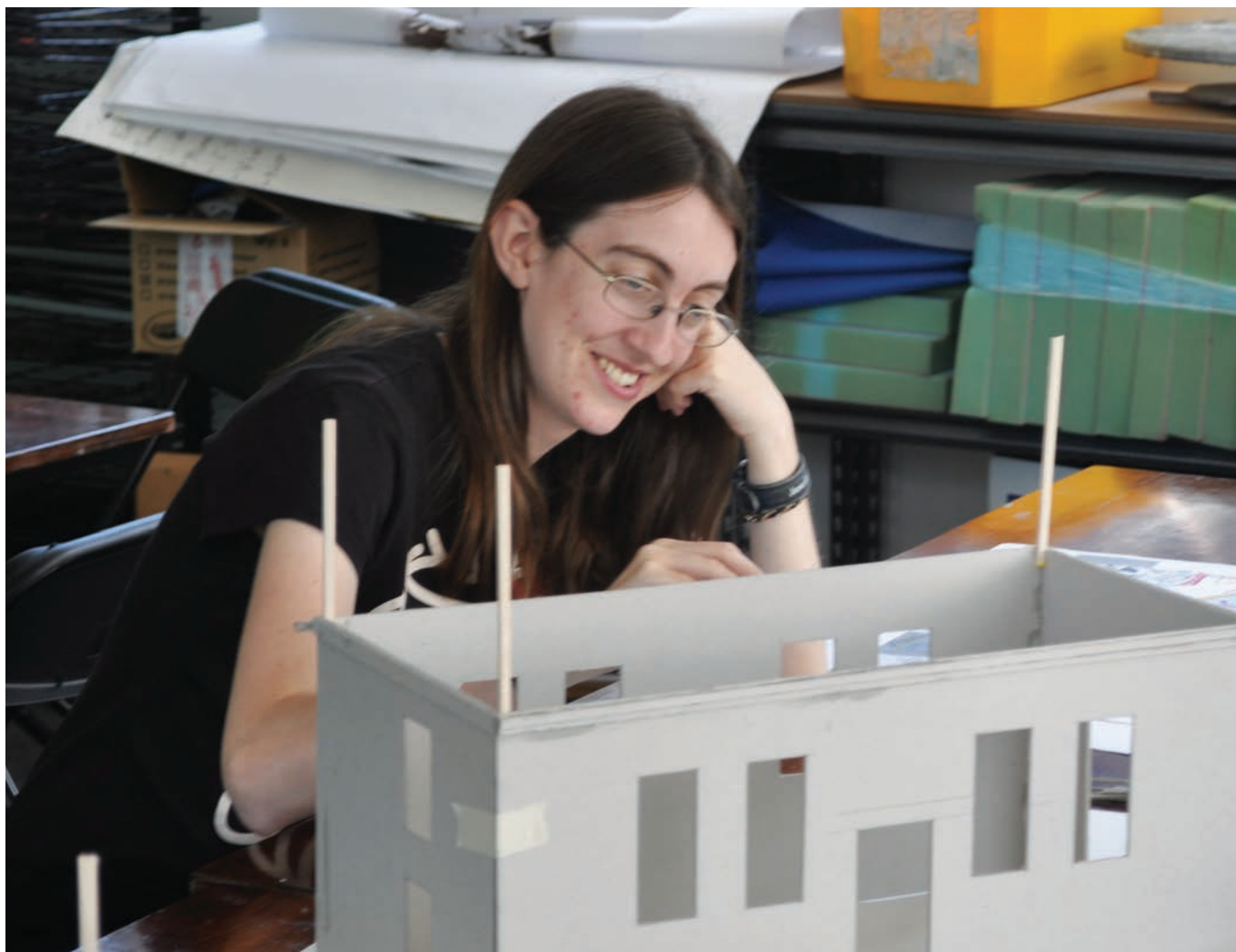
Observations and responses gained from the Evolution participants indicated that they were engaged creatively in practices that led to the achievement of personally satisfying artworks. Post project survey responses (Table 3) gathered from the young people were positive about experimenting, creativity and learning by doing. One participant noted,

*"I learnt that I am creative and that if I give something a go, it will probably turn out better than I expected."*





## Social Connectedness and Cultural Citizenship



Youth worker co-creating

The main ambition of the Evolution project was to assist young people to develop their confidence and artistic capacities, and in doing so, build their capacity to re-engage in further training and education. While the development of positive social skills was important, it was not a primary focus of the project. Coming without any established relationships with others, and often insecure in their own social capacities, the participants commonly worked largely independently on personal art practices. Over time in each cycle individuals did progressively connect with their peers, acknowledging each other's efforts with comments such as "you are very talented," "I wish I could do that, they are wonderful," "wasn't that fun today?" and "I have never made anything like that before." Non-art focused incidental exchanges also occurred.

These focused on personal story sharing, and at times were based on past misdemeanours and exploits. The informal, relaxed and non-hierarchical atmosphere engendered by the artist, the youth worker and the Signal studio-environment, supported these frank exchanges, enabling the young people to connect comfortably with others. Beyond intermittent friendly exchanges the young people did not demonstrate any significant social bonds with each other, though this varied to some degree from cycle to cycle. For example the artist noted that the participants from Cycle Two were more social and more likely to have "two-way conversations." Clare also noted that this group was less skilled in their art practice, which may have orientated them to social rather than artistic engagement.

The focus on individual art making did not give emphasis to collaboration and critical discussion, even though there were occasions of informal opinion sharing. Over time, the participants became more confident to express their opinion. The survey responses (Table 4) indicated that the participants felt they had developed in several areas related to working with others.

The nature of the project, and the way it was framed by the artist, youth worker and Signal staff, engaged the young people as cultural citizens. This was evident through the emphasis given to youth-led art practice and the involvement of the participants in artist-modelled processes. The project length allowed time for the participants to connect with each other in a safe and supportive environment. The young people were conceptualized, enabled and validated as artists, considered capable of generating and making quality artworks as indicated by one participant who noted,

*“I’ve been showing some people my work back at the refuge and they were saying how good it was and could I draw some things for them and that felt really good.”*

This sentiment is reflected in another young person’s comment, “After Evolution I want to continue my arts and develop new skills to eventually create enough quality work that I can make a living off it and exhibit.”

With a focus on artistic achievement rather than therapeutic recreation, the project helped to build self-efficacy and agency amongst the participants. The autonomy and respect entitled to the young people was inter-dependent on them showing respect to others and accepting responsibility for their actions. Eleven out of the eighteen survey responses indicated that the Evolution project had helped the participants to take responsibility.

Opportunities to connect as part of a larger community were offered indirectly and directly throughout the Evolution project. Many of the young people involved were reclusive and had little broad contact with others. In this respect simply being part of the Evolution group was a positive step forward. Layered onto this experience was the opportunity to become a regular user of Signal over an intensive period of time, during which other Signal programs were also commonly running. Personalised interactions with the Signal staff engendered a connection with the place and people who shared the site. Radiating out from Signal was the opportunity to engage directly with the nearby precinct, an experience that connected young people further to physical, artistic and cultural elements of the city. A more overt indicator of community building was displayed in the final end of project public exhibition, which, along with the Evolution participants, brought together friends, family members and representatives from each of the partnering organizations sponsoring the project. This was a significant event for many of the young artists as indicated in by one family member at the final exhibition.

*I think it’s made her feel she is good at something, has some skills. She’s always worried that she’s not good at Maths and some of the really academic subjects. It’s been good to see her feel so proud of the work she has done.*



## Conclusion

*Evolution is the best. It brought out a creative side I wasn't sure I had.*<sup>17</sup>

Young people, who were previously dis-engaged from formal learning, were re-engaged by the Evolution project. This is evident in the high attendance rates and the fact that twenty-five of the thirty-one participants continued on to further study or employment. The project has gained further funding from the City of Melbourne and Melbourne City Mission to continue and was chosen by The Department of Human Services as a best practice model.<sup>18</sup> Other City of Melbourne units are now considering supporting this program, such as the City Safety unit.

Bringing together the skills of an artist and youth worker, and basing the program in a dedicated arts studio, was crucial to the success of Evolution. With no other programs of its type offered in central Melbourne, Evolution has extended the offer of artistic achievement generated through creative challenge. It has re-ignited self-belief amongst young people who were at risk of becoming deeply dislocated. A future challenge will be develop a pool of artists and youth workers capable of realising the potential of the program. The knowledge gained from Evolution provides a significant reference for Signal staff, artists and other professionals who want to re-engage young people through art.



Artwork by Evolution participant Frank

<sup>17</sup> Young participant

<sup>18</sup> Department of Human Services (2011) Good Practice. A Statewide Snapshot. 2011. Melb. DHS. [http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/news-and-events/news/general-news/celebrating-good-practice-in-child,-youth-and-family-services?SQ\\_DESIGN\\_NAME=print](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/news-and-events/news/general-news/celebrating-good-practice-in-child,-youth-and-family-services?SQ_DESIGN_NAME=print)

# Participant Survey

**Table 1: Attendance Rates**

Cycle	Percentage Attendance Rates
Cycle One	81%
Cycle Two	64%
Cycle Three	64%
Cycle Four	81%
Cycle Five	59%

**Table 2: Post Program Survey**

<i>Evolution</i> has been a place for me to:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Focus on my art	14	3	1	0	0
Experiment and explore something new	15	2	1	0	0
During <i>Evolution</i> I gained experience of the following:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Appreciation for art and making art	12	3	2	1	0
A routine	5	3	7	2	0
	Yes I would like more time in the project			No I feel like the amount of time I had in the project was enough	
I would like the opportunity to extend my participation in the <i>Evolution</i> project:	14			2	

**Table 3: Post Program Survey**

<i>Evolution</i> has been a place for me to:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Trust	6	6	3	2	0
Experiment and explore something new	15	2	1	0	0
During <i>Evolution</i> I gained experience of the following:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
An ability to work creatively	12	4	0	2	0
Learning through making things	8	5	2	2	0

**Table 4: Connecting with others**

<b><i>Evolution</i> has been a place for me to:</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Socialise and meet new people	7	7	2	0	1
Learn from others	9	3	2	2	1
<b>During <i>Evolution</i> I gained experience of the following:</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
An ability to learn from others	8	6	1	2	0
An ability to work amongst a group	5	9	0	3	0
A tolerance for difference	4	6	4	3	0
An understanding of people	5	5	4	3	0

**Table 5.1: Participant Profile Cycle 1**

Age range of young people: 17- 20 years old

<b>Cycle One</b>			
<b>Client</b>	<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Attendance</b>	<b>Educational Outcome</b>
Person 'A' 17 years Female	Depression. Year 9 pass. Find social interaction difficult. Victim of bullying.	94%	VCAL-CAE
Person 'B' 17 years Female	Social isolation. Year 9 pass. School refuser. Victim of bullying.	76%	VCAL- The Pavilion
Person 'C' 17 years Male	Anxiety. Depression. Expelled Year 9. Family conflict. AOD	100%	VCAL-Glenroy
Person 'D' 20 years Female	Aspergers. Homeless. Family conflict. Year 9 pass	91%	Hospitality Course
Person 'E' 18 years Male	Aspergers. Agoraphobic. Anxiety. Depression. Year 10 pass.	53%	VCAL-North Fitzroy

**Table 5.2: Participant Profile Cycle 2**

Age range of young people: 15 – 22 years old

<b>Cycle Two</b>			
<b>Client</b>	<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Attendance</b>	<b>Educational Outcome</b>
Person 'A' 15 years Female	Borderline Personality Disorder. School refuser. In DHS residential care. Attempted Year9.	64%	-
Person 'B' 16 years Female	Conduct Disorder. ADHD. Victim of bullying. Year 8 pass.	78%	Hospitality Course
Person 'C' 18 years Male	Homeless. Anxiety. Depression. Year 10 pass	57%	-
Person 'D' 17 years Male	Parent incarcerated. Year 10 pass. AOD	42%	Life Skills Program
Person 'E' 19 years Male	Homeless, Depression, AOD, Year 9 pass	100%	VCAL-North Fitzroy
Person 'F' 15 years Male	Family conflict, anxiety. Parent with mental health. AOD. School refuser	33%	Returned to school Yarra Hills
Person 'G' 22 years Male	Schizophrenia, homeless. Year 9 pass. AOD. Involvement in justice system.	80%	-



**Table 5.3: Participant Profile Cycle 3**

Age range of young people: 17 – 20 years old

Cycle Three			
Client	Barriers	Attendance	Educational Outcome
Person 'A' 17 years Female	Anxiety. AOD Year 9 Pass	62%	Employment
Person 'B' 21 years Male	Socially isolated. Mental health concerns	43%	-
Person 'C' 18 years Female	Homeless. Conflict at home. Poor attendance at school	81%	Returned to school Lynall hall
Person 'D' 20 years Female	Socially isolated. Conflict with family	43%	P/T Admin internship
Person 'E' 18 years Female	Poor attendance at school	100%	Returned to school Lynall Hall
Person 'F' 18 years Female	Depression. Borderline Personality Disorder. AOD. Year 9 pass	64%	Returned to school Lynall hall
Person 'G' 19 years Male	Recently released from Youth Detention. Anxiety. Year 9 pass	57%	Work Placement

**Table 5.4: Participant Profile Cycle 4**

Age range of young people: 15 – 20 years old

Cycle Four			
Client	Barriers	Attendance	Educational Outcome
Person 'A' 15 years Male	Aspergers, Pervasive Development disorder, oppositional Defiant Disorder, Conduct Disorder, ADHD/. Expelled from many schools/programs. Below Year7 pass. Poor Literacy. Involvement in justice system.	86%	The Mirror Program 2012
Person 'B' 19 years Male	AOD, Difficultly engaging with structured learning. Experienced periods of homelessness. Dysfunctional family life. Issues with self-care. Poor vision.	86%	Artful Dodgers Hospitality short course
Person 'C' 15 years Female	Anxiety suffers panic attacks. Long term school refuser. Year 8 pass. Victim and perpetrator of bullying	80%	Return to school 2012
Person 'D' 16 years Female	AOD. History of abuse. Conflict with family. Year 9 pass. Minor involvement in legal system.	73%	Hospitality course TAFE 2012
Person 'E' 20 years Female	Aspergers. Anger management issues. Conflict with family. Has son-cared for by grandparents. Year 9 pass. Expelled from many programs due to violent behaviour.	26%	

**Table 5.5: Participant Profile Cycle 5**

Age range of young people: 16- 22 years old

Cycle Five			
Client	Barriers	Attendance	Educational Outcome
Person 'A' 21 years Female	Socially isolated, poor self esteem, dysfunctional family background, earning difficulties, history of homelessness. Year 10 pass	93%	Looking at TAFE mid year entry options (Year 11/12)
Person 'B' 22 years Male	Homeless, AOD. Chronic health problems. Disability pension	60%	Artful Dodgers
Person 'C' 19 years Female	Homeless, Anxiety, Depression. Pregnant. Year 10 pass	40%	Working P/T, enrolling to do short courses i.e. first aid, driving lessons before birth of child.
Person 'D' 20 years Female	Anxiety/panic disorder/Psychosis. Long history of self-harm. AOD. Involvement in justice system. Year 9 pass.	53%	Youthworx Brunswick
Person 'E' 17 years Female	In DHS care. Dysfunctional family life. Alcohol issues. Parent with mental health and AOD. Victim of bullying at school. Year 10.	88%	Looking for employment. About to be independent of care system. Wants to work.
Person 'F' 17 years Female	Anxiety & Depression. Victim of bullying at school. Year 10 pass.	77%	Enrolingl in VCE TAFE

**Table 6: Post Program Survey**

<i>Evolution</i> has been a place for me to:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Focus on my art	(14)	3	1		
Experiment and explore something new	(15)	2	1		
Fill in my days during the week	(8)	7	1	1	
Learn from others	(9)	3	2	2	1
Learn about myself	5	(8)	1	2	1
Socialise and meet new people	(7)	(7)	2		1

**Table 7: Post Program Survey**

During <i>Evolution</i> I gained experience of the following:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
A routine	5	3	(7)	2	
An understanding of people	(5)	(5)	4	3	
An ability to work amongst a group	5	(9)		3	
A tolerance for difference	4	(6)	4	3	
Comfort in speaking my mind	(6)	(6)	3	2	
Trust	(6)	(6)	3	2	
Contributing	7	(8)		1	
Learning through making things	(8)	5	2	2	
An ability to learn from others	(8)	6	1	2	
Responsibility	5	(6)	4	2	
Appreciation for art and making art	(12)	3	2	1	
An ability to work creatively	(12)	4		2	
Other	"I already had all these things" (3) "to obtain focus" (5)				



## Appendix: The Evolution Partners

Central to the realisation of the Evolution concept was the combined experience and resources of the several partnering organizations that each contributed to the Evolution Advisory Committee.

Signal provided a permanent studio-environment highly suitable for the project and a pool of experienced artists to draw upon.

Melbourne City Mission (MCM), Frontyard Youth Services work together to address the physical, social, and emotional needs of young people up to the age of twenty-five, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Frontyard was responsible for the coordination of the participants and the provision of a youth worker to support participants during and following the program.

The Capital City Local Learning Employment (City LLEN) is a not-for-profit incorporated association aimed to form strategic, collaborative partnerships within the City of Melbourne that enhance the retention, participant and re-engagement of at risk young people. City LLEN co-developed the project, secured the partners, and provided funding support for employment of the youth worker, in-kind support and guidance, funding for brochures, resources for pathway transition, support to achieve successful outcomes and organize partnerships with other relevant agencies as needed. Once the project had been successfully run for several cycles and funding from the City of Melbourne and Frontyard Youth Services was secured, City LLEN had completed its brokering input and as of June 2012 withdrew its involvement in this initiative.

The establishment of Evolution was also informed by the Inner Melbourne VET Cluster (IMVC) – Youth Connections Program, an organization that assists young people within mainstream schooling and disengaged from education by providing advice on career options and applied or vocational training.





Artwork by Evolution participant Kara