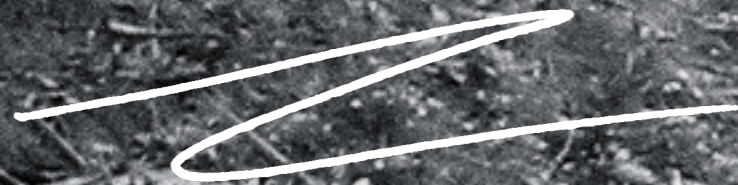


Developing the leadership skills of young people from tough realities

*Breaking the cycle.
Making leaders.*



What are we doing?

Westpac Foundation's grant to Activate Australia is helping young people to develop leadership skills and become role models in disadvantaged communities.

"I feel myself changing into an assertive, confident, ambitious person – what I've always wanted to be."

Activate Australia's What Other Way program participant



From tough realities to new dreams

Young people from tough realities face a number of issues, which can lead to disengagement from education, employment and their community. These include an absence of positive social role models, a lack of opportunities and networks, and low self-esteem or confidence, making it very hard for them to move out of their current situations. Addressing these issues is the aim of Activate Australia's What Other Way (WOW) program.

Activate Australia believes the life experiences of young people with difficult backgrounds can create a solid foundation for leadership. Skills they have gained through challenging situations, such as an ability to make clear decisions under pressure or to respond to adversity, can be developed to their advantage and benefit the broader community over the long term.

The WOW program is modelled on the successful work of the Scotland-based charity Columba 1400, which emphasises the importance of creating an environment that youth from tough realities can thrive within. The program focuses on recognising and building the life skills of young people and helping them look beyond their present lives to new goals and dreams.



Working together

Activate Australia delivers the WOW program within socio-economically disadvantaged communities, one location at a time. It brings together a range of community service providers to create a local community 'hub' that can provide training and support to young people before, during and after they take part in the program.

A grant from Westpac Foundation over the next two years is helping Activate Australia provide nine programs to young people in West Heidelberg, Victoria, in partnership with local community group, Phillip's Gate.

Addressing real-life issues

Participants of the WOW program are usually not at school or work and may have come from backgrounds such as homelessness, substance abuse, juvenile justice and intergenerational unemployment. The program addresses issues such as lack of self-belief and hope for the future, and limited education, life skills and opportunities, through a three-tiered program.

The first part of the program creates an experience and environment for young people designed to increase their self esteem. It involves workshops and activities over a three-week period on self-awareness, team-building and transferable work and life skills. This part of the program is designed to prepare participants for the second and core experience of the program, an eight-day residential leadership academy.

Left Young people take part in Activate Australia's WOW program.

Right Mission Australia's Pathways Program works with disadvantaged families.

During their stay young people take part in an interactive mix of indoor and outdoor workshops, activities and role-plays on various aspects of leadership, such as ethical decision-making, communication, conflict resolution and problem-solving. They develop transferable leadership, work and life skills and identify and develop their own 12-month goal and action plan.

The third part of the WOW program is run over three weeks and helps participants consolidate their action plans. It also connects them to a range of local services to help them achieve their goals. The aim is to build extended networks within the local community that result in new opportunities and stronger links.

After completing the course, graduates receive follow-up support for at least six months, including mentoring and guidance on carrying out their action plans. Reunions are also held to monitor the progress of participants and to provide an opportunity for them to support each other on their personal journeys.

Achieving positive outcomes

People who take part in the WOW program have unique beliefs, experiences, values and aspirations and therefore gain from the program in different ways. For some people, the program has changed their attitudes or broken a negative cycle. Others have benefited from increased opportunities for employment or education.

In general, after completing the program, participants demonstrate qualities of leadership, such as the ability to resolve conflict, increased self-awareness and confidence, the ability to communicate effectively, increased focus and ethical decision-making.

About Westpac Foundation

Westpac Foundation is an independent charitable trust that provides grants to not-for-profit organisations with deductible gift recipient status throughout Australia. Funding is currently directed towards early intervention programs and projects that aim to address the causes of social problems in disadvantaged communities.

Other projects funded by Westpac Foundation include:

- Whitelion Tasmania – Custodial Mentoring program
- YWCA – Y it takes a Village in Campbelltown
- Mission Australia – Girradoola Pathways Program, Western Australia
- Infants Home – Fathering for Life
- Queensland Baptist Care – Glendyne for Girls Indigenous support program
- Barnardos Australia – Kids Time Express

